

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Next Church Council



Spiritual Direction Formation



A Church Moving Towards Healing

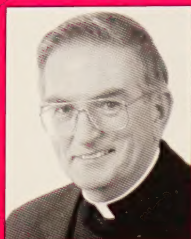


Eating Disorders in Religious Life



Coping With Everyday Stress

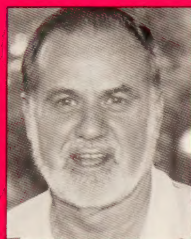
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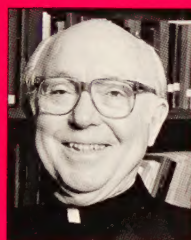
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

LIGHT SHINES IN DARKNESS

I write this three weeks before Holy Week, at a terrible time for our world and our church, for an issue that will appear two months from now. War is wreaking havoc on the lives of the Iraqi people and causing heartbreak for the families of those soldiers of the United States and Great Britain who are being killed and wounded. No matter how one views the morality of this war or envisions its outcome, it is impossible to escape the anxious feeling that something dire has been set loose in our world that will affect all of us for years to come. In addition, the economy of the United States is faltering, making millions anxious about the future and affecting the poorest of our nation the most. Finally, echoes of the crisis in the Catholic Church continue to reverberate, with no clear end in sight. This Lenten season has been a dark time indeed, and even the promise of spring and the celebration of Easter do not seem to have much effect on one's mood.

In an article in this issue, I invite readers to reflect on the experience of Easter in order to understand the kind of human development God wants for us. In this editorial, I want to reflect with you on the darkness adumbrated in the last paragraph, from the point of view of the experience of Easter — from the point of view of our faith in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

We believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, God incarnate; that he suffered a barbarous and cruel death; that he was raised bodily from the dead. What do these beliefs mean in these or any other dark times? A human being with physical relations to the created universe, Jesus is so united with God that he is God. While only he is God, his bodily ties with the universe somehow make the universe holy ground — the place where God dwells forever. Whatever happens in the universe touches God directly through the body of Jesus. That body is now a resurrected body, to be sure, but nonetheless a body that has, in some

mysterious way, ties with the universe. In other words, God has a personal stake in the universe and in humanity because of Jesus. No matter how dark and dangerous an age may seem, we who believe in the resurrection of Jesus can be hopeful because God's love for humanity brought life out of Jesus' barbarous death. Indeed, Jesus' death on the cross is the victory of God: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Moreover, since Jesus' resurrected body is in relation to the whole of the created world, divinity touches all of it. God is present everywhere. Everything, therefore, is a sign of God — a sacramental, as it were. Even the bleakest landscape holds signs of God's presence. All we need to do is to look with faith and hope.

I recall a story told by Father Pedro Arrupe, the late superior general of the Society of Jesus. Once, when he was visiting a very poor slum neighborhood in Brazil, an old, grizzled man invited him to come to his shack, saying he had something to give to Father Arrupe. At first a bit fearful, Arrupe followed the man. When they got to the shack, the man asked Arrupe to sit down, and together they watched the sun set in glorious splendor over the wretched slum. The old man said that he had nothing else to give to his visitor to thank him for coming. For Arrupe, it was a gift of light and love that touched him deeply.

There are many signs that the Spirit of the risen Jesus is active even in our darkest hours. Father Arrupe saw one in the slum in Brazil. As I began writing this editorial in the dark hours alluded to, I received an e-mail that described an extraordinary encounter between a group of Americans and an Iraqi doctor in the desert between Baghdad and the border of Jordan. The Americans, part of a peace group that had gone to Baghdad before the war began, had been ordered to leave by the Iraqi government. One of their vans, traveling across the desert at high speed, blew a tire and crashed into a ditch. The occupants escaped, but some had relatively serious wounds. An Iraqi civilian, driving by, stopped to help and drove them to the nearest town, Rutba. The hos-

pital in Rutba had been severely bombed a few days earlier, so the Americans were taken to a temporary clinic, where the doctor did what he could for the wounded, apologizing for the absence of medications and pain remedies because of the sanctions and the war. When the Americans offered to pay him, he refused, saying, "We treat everyone in our clinic — Christian, Muslim, American, or Iraqi. We are all part of the same family, you know." The writer of the e-mail, David Hilfiker, a Washington, D.C., physician, who was told the story by a friend who was among the wounded, says, "There is still hope in our world." The Spirit is at work, even in the hearts of those who should be enemies.

We need to keep our eyes and ears and hearts open to notice such signs of the light that cannot be overcome by any amount of darkness. And we need to tell one another our stories of seeing the light.

I want to end with one further reflection. Because God is so implicated in our world — not only through ongoing creation but especially through the incarnation — God, I believe, mysteriously suffers with us. Have you ever wondered where your sympathy and sorrow come from when you see or hear of people suffering needlessly? Could it not be that we experience, in some wondrous way, the suffering of God? A woman I know works in pastoral care in a hospital. Often she is almost overcome with love and sorrow when she encounters parents who have just lost a child or children who have been abused by adults. She believes that she is experiencing some fraction of God's love and pain. It's almost as though God were saying, "This is not what I want for my world." I believe she is correct.

I once heard Father David Fleming, S.J., say that the sorrow and shame that we pray to experience for our sins and the sins of the world when we make the

Spiritual Exercises is the sorrow and shame of God. At first this sounded puzzling, but then I thought about it. God creates and keeps sustaining everything in our world, including us human beings, even when we do unspeakable things to other human beings. Thus, God is implicated not only in our virtuous acts but also in our sinful acts, at least by allowing them. It is not farfetched to believe that God must rue some of the horrors that God's creative and sustaining word permits to happen. Perhaps the shame and sorrow we experience, then, is a pale reflection of God's sorrow and shame at being part of the horrors perpetrated by human beings.

Indeed, our deepest and truest thoughts and emotions may be only pale reflections of the experience of our God — who, in creating and sustaining our world and then taking flesh in it, has taken on both the heights and the depths of what humanity can do and suffer. Even in our deepest darkness, even in our sinning, we are never alone. God is always with us, suffering with us, rejoicing with us, sustaining us, and calling us to friendship. It is no small thing that God seems to want friends who will share God's joys and sorrows.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." By the time you read this editorial, I pray that we will have seen that the darkness of these early-April days has not overcome the light.

Bill Barry S.J.

William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

Task for the Next Church Council

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.

Have we a new Council of the Church in our near future? When Pope John XXIII answered that question affirmatively back in 1959, the rather sclerotic Catholic Church of the time faced a broadening crisis of relevancy, but nothing like the catastrophe we have experienced since January 2002. As we discovered how widespread was the crisis of child sexual abuse by priests, how long a time it had been going on, and how church leaders had concealed it, we entered a devastating period of collapsing trust and fierce recrimination.

The bishops, meeting in Dallas last June, placed some new obstacles in the way of actual abuse by priests (whether strong enough, we do not yet know). Their formula for dealing with past abuses struck many as posing serious doubts about due process, raising a new controversy of its own. But since November 2002, when they accepted the drastic revision of that formula by Roman authority, many people have feared that any crackdown is essentially compromised — that American bishops have now abdicated responsibility for meeting the crisis, leaving it up to curial officials in Rome. Discussion of the Christian imperatives of reconciliation and forgiveness, common after Dallas, fade out of the picture now, as the institutional church appears too distracted even to consult its own tradition and responds, for

the most part, only to media pressures.

We have urgent questions about whether the bishops, whose actions horrify us even more than those of the pederasts, will be held accountable in any credible way. That is terribly disillusioning for all who wish to have confidence in the church as an institutional structure through which to live their faith. Accountability, which seems an ultimate red-line question for the Roman authorities, constitutes a quite distinct issue from the pervasive sexual disorders. Since the cardinal archbishop of Boston has had to resign his see, calls for other resignations abound; all refer to the pope as the only one who can judge, order, or accept them. Roman officials shrink from the thought, fearing that bishops may go down like a row of dominoes.

An outstanding piece of research done by reporters for the *Dallas Morning News* (12 June 2002) established a claim that some two-thirds of the bishops of dioceses in the United States (at least 111 of what they classify as the nation's 178 "mainstream," or Roman rite, Catholic dioceses) have in some way protected or concealed offender priests, brothers, or other religious. *New York Times* reporter Laurie Goodstein (1 December 2002) has widened that count, claiming such offenses in all but two of those dioceses — to the chagrin of Andrew Greeley, who

Two questions stand out: One about our attitudes, the other about the governance of the church

described this, in *America* (10 February 2003), as an anti-Catholic attack. All this tells us how far such a purge could go, and some may want that. If we are to attack this problem root and branch, however, we must be clear that the roots are in Rome, where officialdom expected that bishops would set as their first priority the protection of the institution's reputation from scandal.

That is not to say that the pope did it; this is the sort of thing that comes from a bureaucracy. Nor should we be surprised. This is the way of large institutions, as examples ranging from Enron to the United States government constantly teach us. Bishops have simply followed institutional procedures. We have to suspect that any bishop who would not go along would have found himself at the end of his career course.

We have serious questions, then, to ask about basic habits in the church. Angry though people may be, we make fools of ourselves if we believe that a few hangings, a reign of terror in the church, will resolve these issues. Our ills are so endemic to the system that it is mere evasion to heap all the blame on individuals. Venting our outrage on them may give us some self-indulgent satisfaction, but it does not address the underlying problems at all. Two obvious questions stand out: one about our attitudes toward sexuality, the other about the governance of the church. On both matters, our whole process needs to be opened up. While there may be other ways of doing this, the traditional one is in a Council of the Church.

This may well be the matter of a new papacy, which will come in its time, although Pope John Paul II keeps surprising those who write him off and addressing new problems with new energy. We may expect that when the cardinals next meet to elect a

pope, these matters, weighing on the whole Catholic church, will be at the front of their minds. The leaders in the church have a responsibility to ask why these things have happened. We will all be telling them they must deal with this when electing a Pope, and the one chosen will have to address this disaster in some appropriate way.

THE SEX-ABUSE QUESTION

Anyone can see the social immaturity, especially the retarded psychosexual development, of predator priests. There have to be reasons for these disorders, and things in the experience and formation of these priests that have led to their perversions. We hear a good deal about sexual sin, but basic attitudes toward sexuality are among the things that we shy away from discussing in our church.

It does not stand to our credit if we regard one of God's most precious gifts to us with the disdain and evasion that human sexuality has received in much of our tradition, the furtiveness with which it is treated. This applies not only to Catholics but to most other Christians as well. The antisexual tradition goes back to Saint Augustine, many of his contemporaries, and even older authorities, but actually has its roots in the pagan world of their time, its dualism (reflected in the Manichaeism that had so attracted Augustine), and its disgust with the body and the material circumstances of life.

In the recruitment of our Catholic clergy and religious, this attitude creates opportunities for young people simply to evade or postpone dealing with the issue of sexuality at all, treating it as something that has nothing to do with them. Many of us know celibates who, even much later in life, have never genuinely faced themselves. This is especially tempting to those with some ambivalence, uncertainty, or fear about their own sexuality. We may try to screen out such individuals as candidates, but we can expect little success if the screeners themselves share those attitudes.

The bishops at the Second Vatican Council made a concerted effort never to accept this disparagement of the sexual character of human beings and the sexual expression of human love, particularly in their teaching on celibacy. But the poisoning tradition still holds on — one that sees people's sexuality as the bad thing about them, of which they should be ashamed, and suggests that they try to live as if they didn't have it. Discussion of this whole area has long been treated with so much reluctance and suspicion as to contribute to a widespread immaturity in our community — such that we ought not be surprised when

it leads to bizarre consequences like priest-pedophilia and ephebophilia. The wild chaos of sexual permissiveness that characterizes so much of our contemporary scene can actually be seen as simply the reverse side of this same coin.

Many commentators, some with preconceived agendas, want to approach this pathology with instant solutions, like the abolition of mandatory celibacy or the ordination of women, without undertaking the more fundamental reflection that the matter requires. These issues will doubtless come into the picture and will eventually have the attention of such a Council as we may hope to see. (They did come up at the last Council, Vatican II, but were taken off the table and reserved instead for curial consideration.) We owe it to the integrity of the faith to examine this void in our understanding of the human being more carefully before settling for easy solutions.

Many, even among those of manifest goodwill toward the church and its traditions, question whether celibacy or virginity can ever be other than damaging to the persons committed to them. No one will be able to defend their value convincingly unless a mature and welcoming understanding of sexuality and sexual identity become the common property of Christians.

Still more pressing, however, is the question of authority structures in the church.

THE AUTHORITY QUESTION

We have seen protection of the institution and its managers set above even the most basic moral responsibilities. Our foundational Christian Scripture calls for the most open dealings among us. The “rulers of the gentiles,” we are told, “lord it over them, and their great men know how to make their authority felt,” but “among you this is not to happen” (Matt. 20, 25). Ours is to be a church where “there is nothing hidden, but it must be disclosed, nothing kept secret except to be brought to light” (Mark 4, 22). To appeal to such fundamentals of Christ’s teaching seems simply ironic today, and we need to ask why.

We have become a very law-bound church. That in itself accords ill with the priorities set in the letters of Saint Paul, which stress that our salvation is by faith, not by the works of the law. We search our scripture for a “law of Christ,” and what we find, in such texts as the Sermon on the Mount, is instead an insistence that we must never satisfy ourselves with observing merely the requirements set by a law. Instead, we must always strive to do more, to put ourselves at the service of others — never by constraint,

**The Christian ideal has
not been tried and
found wanting; it has
been found difficult and
left untried**

but by a willing offering of self. You can’t codify that.

That makes the Christian community an unwelcome place in which to develop a culture of law. We have a different kind of mandate from Christ — more difficult, perhaps, but freer. The Christian community is to build up its members in a living of the faith, in the confident service of God in others around us, especially those most in need. Of course, the Christian community eventually became large and complex, acquiring respectability and a great deal of secular responsibility for civil society — first under Constantine and his successor emperors, and again in the harsher eleventh century. By then it found itself in need of orderly structures for its own governance.

What happened was that it turned, for lack of any specifically Christian structure of law, to purely secular sources. Just by reason of time and place, the Christians who established our internal canons of law adopted the categories of Roman law, which still dominate not only the canon law of the Catholic church but also, as Code Napoleon, the legal systems of most European countries.

That law is Roman but has no essentially Christian character to it. It is the law of empire, and its governing premise is that the will of the sovereign is law. That this should have become the basis of canon law is entirely anomalous. It is the very system of domination that Christ so explicitly rejects for his followers. It has provided a kind of order — essentially, an imposition of order — to much of Europe ever since Roman imperial times, but its fundamental flaw is that there is no room in it for making those who govern accountable to those whom they govern.

By no choice of his, but by the simple fact of his rank within this system of Roman law, such a figure as Cardinal Law in Boston, like any other bishop — caught though he was in the headlights of a condition

that is the fundamental commonplace throughout the church so governed — was constituted judge of his accusers. How could he escape this? Early in the debacle, the lay members of several existing parish councils, some of the most devoted of all his Catholic people, attempted to construct an association among them — a much milder venture than the better-known Voice of the Faithful. The inevitable response, in terms of the law as constituted, was to reject the association as something built other than on the executive's will and hence potentially divisive. Much later in the year, shortly before his resignation, when he did finally meet Voice of the Faithful representatives, his initial observation to them was that he wished they had sought his permission before forming their association. We can see institutional culture in this paradoxical response. Yet the cardinal was accountable, not by his own choice but by the situation common to all his fellow bishops, only to higher authority. Calls for accountability from below could only, from this point of view, be an anomaly.

Is this form of legal structure of the nature of Christianity? By no means. "The Christian ideal," as G. K. Chesterton once told us, "has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried."

We are often told that the church is no democracy, and the reasoning has been, essentially, that this Roman imperial system is the form of its law. But that has nothing whatever to do with Christian principle. The Roman system was adopted only because it was the most obvious law available at the time when the church first found itself so extensive an institution as to need some such structure of order. It has had so long a tenure in the church's experience that it will be a painfully intricate thing to extract ourselves from its tentacles, should we so choose, but that is the enterprise that our current predicament demands. Such a task will require a commitment longer than the duration of a Council of the Church, but its initiation is properly the work of a Council.

Undoubtedly, many of the authority figures who reign in the church would find it much more comfortable to resist any accountability. They have lived without it as long as they have had their jobs. But the situation has become untenable now. The executive seat in the church-as-corporation currently stands empty. This must pose a dilemma for our present pope — a centralizing figure who yet asks so earnestly for the thoughts of all Christians on how his office may better contribute to unity in the church. It has got to emerge as the main topic of discussion when the cardinals meet to elect his successor. The man who emerges from that conclave, unless it has been a

conventicle of simple intransigence, will know that this is the top item on his plate.

Alternative structures of law, as models for order in our enormous church, are hard to come by, and we can hardly expect that a system of order faithfully Christian in its inspiration will come easily or quickly. We are much attached, in the United States, to the common-law system of justice that we inherited from English experience. Common law, built on the binding force of precedent, does produce accountability, rendering the rulers as responsible to the law as the subjects. It has fabricated a thick planting of precedent laws that bind the ruler as well as the subject, and thus protect the individual from the arbitrary will of authority. So much, so good; it has been the seedbed of as much democracy as we have yet attained. But it too has its dark side in its massively adversarial and vindictive character. Our American culture has become savagely punitive and vengeful under its aegis; witness, among other things, our society's attachment to the death penalty. The common-law system can make no more claim to be proper to Christian life than can the Roman model.

What remains? There are, of course, multiple systems of law we could draw on, many of which are free of either the arbitrary, unaccountable character of the Roman law or the exclusively retributive character of common law. Many of these systems of justice exist among peoples whom we in the West tend to regard patronizingly, as having civilizations less complex than ours. Yet South Africans, seeking a more wholesome system of justice than the one they received from the European colonists, found much of value in the native African concept of *ubuntu* — the strong, restorative concept that inspired their Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Lawyers and judges in our country, and in some parts of Europe and Australia, have experimented with systems of restorative justice, in which the objective is the restoration of relations in society rather than mere retribution, but these remain a novelty, still in their teething stage. Those so inclined have found some useful lessons in the practices of Native Americans, the circle-sentencing concept among their most attractive features. None of these, though helpful, have specifically the inspiration of Christian gospel behind them — but neither has the current Roman-law-inspired law of the church.

Are we capable, then, of constructing a system of internal order for our church that would genuinely spring from sources within the Christian gospel tradition? The process would have to begin by recognizing the profoundly a-Christian, even anti-Christian, character of the law we presently have — disruptive of

Christian living and corrosive, as we are seeing with the sex scandal, of the most fundamental values of Christian faith. We would have to reflect long and carefully to build an ordered church community that truly related to values of that faith, and we could not expect to construct it at one stroke. We have a time before us to learn some of the humility that is so conspicuously lacking in the system by which we now operate.

The Second Vatican Council, in fact, went some distance toward constructing such a system in the first two chapters of *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the church. Those chapters, however, have since been negated — first by a distrustful period of anxiety, and then by a concentrated period of clawing back from any tendencies toward the accountability of those who govern.

Is this indeed the work of a Council? We may well believe so — and one much needed in the face of the deservedly low esteem into which the governance of the church has fallen. The Council would need to face squarely both of these outstanding questions: the sexuality question and that of law and structure. On the sexuality question, the church needs to hear from many persons of authority, intellectual and spiritual, other than bishops. Just as much, on the matter of law and a structure of service, humility, and account-

ability, many other than the bishops of the church need to be heard and respectfully consulted.

The crisis of the sexual abuse of minors by priests — not merely a Bostonian or an American problem but a universal church problem, so long smoldering but only recently exploding in our faces after long concealment — has made these questions so acute that they can hardly be evaded any longer.

We face challenges to the basic credibility of our church, and hence of our teaching, of no less magnitude than those of the sixteenth century. The Catholic Church responded poorly then, and paid with centuries of division and dissension among Christian believers when its defensiveness turned the attempted Reformation into a lasting breach. If we should treat the present crisis as less serious than it is, we can expect to see disruption of a comparable sort.



Father Raymond G. Helmick, S.J., teaches conflict resolution in the Theology Department of Boston College. For many years he has mediated in conflicts ranging from Northern Ireland to the Middle East to the Balkans.

The Empty Nest May Lead to a New Lease on Life

It is widely believed that parents experience significant dislocation when their children all leave home. Not so fast, says psychologist Karen L. Fingerman, Ph.D., of Purdue University. According to her research, most parents experience greater freedom, a chance to reconnect with spouses, and more time to pursue their own goals once their children are gone from the home. In addition, most parents feel a sense of pride and happiness as they see their children move toward successful adulthood and find that their relationship with their children actually improves. Fingerman's research has concentrated on women, for the most part. Helen M.

DeVries, Ph.D., of Wheaton College, finds that men have the more difficult time coping with the empty nest, perhaps because fathers prepare themselves less for this eventuality than do mothers.

Many parents, in recent years, do not experience the emptying of the nest. Linda L. Bips, Ed.D., of Muhlenberg College, finds a tendency at this time for parents to involve themselves much more with their children while they are in college. In addition, the nest seems to be refilling as adult children return home after college or soon after. A report on these studies appears in *Monitor on Psychology*, April 2003, pp. 40-41.

The Human Development God Wants

William A. Barry, S.J.

In *The Joy of Being Wrong* — an original and dense theological work on, of all things, original sin — James Alison uses the anthropology of René Girard to develop his theory. In this article I want to present some thoughts, gleaned from Alison's work and that of others, that have relevance to the notion of human development that the editors of this magazine hope to foster.

Alison takes the stance that we cannot understand the doctrine of original sin (or, for that matter, any Christian doctrine) unless we, like the first disciples, begin with the experience of the resurrected Jesus. The New Testament's first concern, he maintains, is "an announcement about God." He writes, "The resurrection of Jesus was not a miraculous event within a preexisting framework of understanding of God, but the event by which God recast the possibility of human understanding of God."

N. T. Wright makes a somewhat similar point in a 1996 article in *Bible Review*. He argues that much of theology started with an oppressive notion of God, into which it tried to fit Jesus, thus producing

perately risky, indeed apparently crazy, vocation, riding into Jerusalem, denouncing the Temple, dining once more with his friends, and dying on a Roman cross — and that we somehow allow our meaning of the word "God" to be recentered on that point.

Wright agrees with Alison that we need to include the experience of the resurrection to know what the word God means. Both authors state emphatically that we can only understand God, insofar as we can understand God at all, from the vantage point of the historical human being Jesus of Nazareth, and specifically in the context of his death by crucifixion and his resurrection. From this same vantage point, I believe, we can understand the kind of human development God wants.

THE EXPERIENCE OF EASTER

What did the first disciples experience with Easter? Contemplating the story of the two disciples (perhaps a married couple) on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) gives us some insight. They "had hoped" that Jesus was the Messiah who would lead Israel out of bondage to gentile rulers and to their corrupting influence. More than that, their hope for

a Jesus who only seems to be truly human, but in fact is not. My proposal is not that we know what the word "God" means, and manage somehow to fit Jesus into that. Instead, I suggest that we think historically about a young Jew, possessed of a des-

the Messiah, like the hope of Israel as a people, was hope not just for Israel alone but also for the whole world. With the coming of the Messiah, Israel's vocation to be the light to the gentiles would be fulfilled, and all peoples would stream to worship the one true God — the God who had chosen Israel for this very vocation. These hopes had been dashed when Jesus died the humiliating, demeaning death of a criminal on a Roman cross.

It is important for our understanding of their despair to realize that certain Jews had considered themselves the Messiah (and had been considered the Messiah by influential religious leaders) during the century before and the one after the time of Jesus. Their deaths, most by crucifixion, were thought to be proof that each was not the Messiah. The disciples had no category of "crucified Messiah" — for them, that phrase would have been an oxymoron. In addition, Jesus died as a despised, degraded victim. With this kind of cruel judicial murder, Rome showed its vassals who was boss, in effect saying, "You are of no account to us. We have the power; you are nothing." Such a degrading death could not have been the victory of God that the Messiah was supposed to inaugurate. No wonder that these disciples could say to the stranger they met on the road, "We had hoped." Their hopes were now as dead as Jesus himself.

This stranger, however, proceeded to tell them the story of Israel in such a way as to make sense of that seeming debacle. It was a revolutionary telling of the story, but one that had been adumbrated by the prophets. It took some time for the full impact of the stranger's retelling of the story to sink in, leading to the development of Christian theology. The story needs to be assimilated by each generation of Christians — indeed, by each Christian — and its full impact and meaning are never exhausted. The implications of the experience, in faith, of the resurrection of Jesus have relevance to our understanding of human development — a relevance that goes hand in glove with a deeper understanding of who God is.

MEANING FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Death Has No Sting. The disciples experienced something extraordinary. In history, a human being who had been cruelly put to death was raised from death to live forever. Death had no dominion over him, and according to him, over anyone who believed in him. "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). Prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus, there were intimations that the dead lived on, but no experience could be pointed to as a ground for this belief. Now the disciples experienced

the same Jesus, who had lived with them and who had died on the cross, as alive and acting in history. Moreover, his continued existence as a human being was different from the continued existence of Lazarus or the daughter of Jairus whom Jesus had raised from the dead — both of whom, we presume, lived ordinary lives until their second death. Jesus appeared and disappeared at will, for one thing, and seemed to move through space and time in unusual ways. He was not immediately recognized until he made some gesture or said something that brought recognition. Finally, he did not die again, but disappeared from their sight, promising the gift of the Spirit, who would make his presence available to people until the end of time — a promise fulfilled at Pentecost.

As the disciples took in these extraordinary experiences and reflected on them, they became less and less afraid of persecution and of death. For example, after they had been flogged, Peter and the apostles "rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name" (Acts 5:41). These were the same apostles who had cowered behind closed doors after the crucifixion of Jesus. As Stephen was being stoned to death, "he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,'" and then "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:59-60). Faith in Jesus mitigates or removes, it seems, debilitating fear of pain and even of death. This kind of faith led Paul to cry out:

When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:54-57)

As a result of the experience of the resurrection, the disciples could not define God as deathless in contrast to human beings. God creates us to live forever. We, too, are deathless, proved by the fact that Jesus was resurrected. Faith, of course, is required, but it is a faith grounded in the experience of the first disciples, who saw and believed. Jesus lives as a human being beyond death and tells us that such living is ours as well as his. Human development means a growth in trust that God's gift of life is eternal and, thus, a mitigation of the fear of death.

God Is Forgiving Love. The disciples also discovered that Jesus, who had, on the cross, forgiven his

Jesus appeared and disappeared at will, and seemed to move through space and time in unusual ways

torturers, now demonstrated his forgiveness and continuing love and friendship for his friends, who had abandoned and denied him. Moreover, he gave them the power to forgive others' sins in his name. God was not only gratuitous love; God was also forgiving love. God even forgave those who abandoned, denied, or killed the beloved Son. If God could forgive such sins, then nothing could separate human beings from God's love except the absolute refusal of that love — and even then, God's love would not change.

No one who experienced such forgiveness in Jesus could any longer define God as one who condemns those who do not toe the line, do not follow the commandments exactly. Human beings are not put into this world in order to fulfill God's willful commands. Whatever the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" of Eden meant, it did not mean an arbitrary demand of a God who could not countenance rivals as the serpent insinuated: "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5). God cannot be defined in any way as a rival of human beings or as concerned about such rivalry. God is gratuitous and forgiving love. The human development God wants is growth in the acceptance of God's desire to forgive us, no matter what we have done, and growth in the trust that God is not a demanding tyrant.

God Wants Us to Love One Another and Makes It Possible. These early disciples — who had, during Jesus' life and, perhaps, immediately after his death, been caught in relationships of mistrust and rivalry toward one another — found in themselves a love for one another that must have mystified them at first. In the gospels, especially that of Mark, the disciples are often depicted as being in rivalry with one another. For example, after the third prediction of the passion,

James and John asked Jesus if they could sit at his right and left in the kingdom. Mark writes, "When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John," prompting Jesus to tell them that "he came not to be served but to serve" (10:35-45).

Now, after the descent of the Spirit, these same disciples and their new converts are depicted in this way:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas [which means "son of encouragement"]. He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37)

Admittedly, this depiction may be idealized, but it does point to a reality in the early Christian community that was very different from what had gone on before. The early Christians found not only that they were not engaged in rivalry with one another but also that they were not acquisitive and hoarding; indeed, they were spontaneously generous in giving and receiving.

Moreover, the early Christians were distinguished by their love for one another — so much so that this love became a witness to the truth of their beliefs, as Tertullian (ca. 200 A.D.) claimed: "It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!'" In his sociological study *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark (who cites Tertullian's statement) maintains that one of the causes of the spectacular rise of Christianity in a few short centuries was this love for one another, evident especially in the response to the numerous epidemics that continually bedeviled ancient times. He shows that pagans tended to shun those who caught the various plagues, while Christians took care of their own sick as well as their sick pagan neighbors. As a result, not only did Christians and their pagan neighbors weather the crisis of the epidemics with fewer deaths; the charity of the Christians was not lost on the surviving pagans, who began to embrace this new religion.

Stark notes that something new had entered the

world with the development of Judeo-Christian thought: “the linking of a highly *social* ethical code with religion.”

What was new was the notion that more than self-interested exchange relations were possible between humans and the supernatural. The Christian teaching that God loves those who love him was alien to pagan beliefs. . . . Equally alien to paganism was the notion that because God loves humanity, Christians cannot please God unless they love one another. . . . Moreover, such responsibilities were to be extended beyond the bonds of family and tribe, indeed to ‘all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1Cor. 1:2). These were revolutionary ideas.

What Stark maintains here underlines the supposition of this article — namely, that a new understanding about God and about human beings came into the world with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Even more, what came into the world was the communal belief that it was possible to live the way of Jesus and the communal practice of that way. The human development God wants is growth in the ability to love one another.

The Trinity and Human Relationships. In the light of the resurrection, the early Christians came to realize that God is intrinsically relational, and that because of who God is, we too are intrinsically relational. The doctrine of the Trinity was only gradually elaborated, but very early Christians recognized that the One whom Jesus called Father, Jesus himself, and the Spirit who enlivened Christians are one God, yet distinct from and in relation to one another. The three are so united in their mutual relationships that these relationships are the One Mystery we call God. There is no rivalry among them; they love one another absolutely.

Throughout the centuries, Christians have tried to make theological sense of what they believed, but they were hindered by the kind of philosophy available that defined the human person in nonrelational terms. When they applied this nonrelational definition of person to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they had to make the concept relational by saying that in God, the “persons” are distinguished only by their relations to one another. Unfortunately, they did not follow this insight to the conclusion that every human person can only be defined relationally.

The late Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, however, did come to that realization. In *Persons in Relation* he maintains that individuals “are constituted by their mutual relation to one another. ‘I’ exist only as one element in the complex ‘You and I.’” In

One cause of the spectacular rise of Christianity was love for one another

other words, there is no “I” without some “you.” The same understanding of person undergirds Girard’s anthropology as explained by Alison. I do not know whether Macmurray and Girard were influenced by Christian beliefs in the development of their ideas, but it may be that the long tradition of Western philosophical reflection that led to their insights has something to do with the Christian belief that God is One and yet intrinsically relational.

Human beings are made in the image and likeness of the triune God. With the faith-inspired experience of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Christians came to understand that human beings were intrinsically relational and called, from the beginning, to be like God in their relationships. This is the kind of human development God wants.

WHAT WE ARE SAVED FROM

Now we turn to the realization of the early Christians that they had been saved from something that contaminated their lives and the lives of everyone else in the world — namely, what Paul (in chapter 5 of Romans) calls the effects of the sin of Adam. Earlier, Paul had written that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-24). Because of the salvation they had received and were experiencing in faith, the early Christians realized that they and all other human beings had been in a sinful state. As Alison remarks, “the content of original sin is known only in the process of its forgiveness.” From what are we being saved? If we can only know its content as we are forgiven it, then we see the contours of original sin as we allow ourselves to be embraced by the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The experience, in faith, of his life, death, and resurrection saves us from a crip-

What Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote is literally true: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God”

pling and, ultimately, sinful relationship with God, with one another, and with the universe.

From Rivalry with God. We human beings want to be deathless, like God, but we want that not as the gift that it is but as something that we grasp and control. The serpent's words to Eve tempt her to try to do just that. Notice that our grasping for likeness to God is based on the fear that we cannot have it unless we grasp it. We act as though we were in a rivalrous relationship with God. But the experience of salvation reveals to us that what we are grasping at has been freely given because God is gratuitous love. God desires us into being precisely so that we can be like God, so that we can be friends of God, so that we can live forever. Insofar as we believe in the God revealed by Jesus, we are freed of fear and can accept being and life and everything else as the gratuitous gifts they are. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:18).

From Rivalry with One Another. In addition, our experience of the salvation wrought by Jesus frees us to love one another and reveals that the boundaries of such love cannot be set anywhere short of the whole human race. We recognize, as we are being saved, that we are no different from others, that we all fall short of what God hopes for us in our relationship with God, with one another, and with the universe. When, for example, I look into the eyes of Jesus on the cross and hear him say, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” I know that he means me too, not just those who are actually crucifying him. I too have sinned and fallen short; I have been craven and cowardly and fearful enough to

know that I might well have been one of his crucifiers or his betrayer. I am just as much in need of his forgiveness as is any other human being, and if I have been kept from the worst that our kind can do, it is only by the grace of God. My brothers and sisters in complicity are everywhere, and all of us are equally offered the forgiving love of God; all are the beloved sons and daughters of God who have gone astray. I cannot exclude anyone from that circle, because God does not exclude anyone from it. The only way someone can get out of that circle is by self-exclusion — by refusing the love and forgiveness offered and doing it definitively and forever. God takes an awful risk in creating us in God's own image.

From the Need for Scapegoats. From this point of view, we are also freed from the search for someone else to blame for our plight. From the story of the first man and woman in Genesis on, we humans have been trying to foist the blame for what has gone wrong on others. Adam blames Eve; Eve blames the serpent. We all want to deny our own complicity in the sinful state of our world. In doing so, we often look for scapegoats and make them bear our guilt, as the Israelites did with real goats in the desert. This search for someone else to blame leads to bigotry, to stigmatization, and, taken to its full extent, to such horrors as the “final solution” of the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, and the appalling genocide in Rwanda, all of which we witnessed in the past century alone. Jesus died because of this search for a scapegoat, among other reasons. Caiaphas, the high priest, cried out to those who were trying to protect Jesus, “You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (John 11:49-50). Jesus, God's own Son, was the ultimate scapegoat. The search for scapegoats is part of the sinful state from which we have been saved.

From Individualism. What we realize, as we are freed to love our fellow human beings, is that we have been living out of tune with the creative desire of God, which brings us into being to live in love with one another. We realize that our relationships are, as Macmurray notes, problematic because they are based not on love for others but on fear for ourselves. (Alison would say that they are problematic because they are based on rivalry, which may well amount to the same thing.) Fear for oneself leads, ultimately, to an individualism contrary to God's triune being, in whose image we are created.

A Note on Concupiscence. The effects of the sin of

Adam still reside in us, in a tendency to revert to those ways of understanding life and of living it that are out of tune with God's nature and with God's dream in creating us. The church has called this effect of original sin "concupiscence," a tendency to fall short of the glory of God. But we have the possibility of continual conversion from this effect because the Holy Spirit has been given to us. We can, by the grace of the Spirit, develop into the kind of human beings God desires. We are called to develop into "friends of God and prophets" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:27) in the image of Jesus, and we are given the grace to do so.

PRAYER AND WITNESS

Two final comments are in order. First, we become friends with someone only by entering into a trusting, transparent relationship with that person. In the course of growing in friendship, friends develop shared values, dreams, and hopes. In other words, they become like one another. To develop into friends of God in the image of Jesus, we need to engage in such a relationship of trust and transparency with Jesus and with his Father. Such an engagement is called prayer. As we get to know and love Jesus more and more, we grow in likeness to him and, thus, in likeness to God.

The second comment has to do with the reach of this notion of human development. What we Christians believe is not some arcane doctrine that has relevance only to us. No, our God is the one true God, we believe, and Jesus of Nazareth, a historical person, is the Son of God, raised bodily from the dead. In other words, we believe that in Jesus, God is eternally present to, and incarnated in, humanity. What Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote is literally true: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." God creates our world to call all human beings to the kind of human development modeled for us by Jesus. This kind of human development is hope for the

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and love Jesus more
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whole world. We are called to be friends of God, and prophets to our world of this hope. But it would be foreign to the way of Jesus to try to force our beliefs on others. We must do what the early Christians did: witness to the truth about this real world with our words and, especially, with our lives. To foster such witness is the main mission of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

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Eating Disorders in Religious Life

Luisa M. Saffiotti, Ph.D.

The front page of a leading Catholic publication shows a group of younger women in religious life, two-thirds of whom are significantly overweight. At a weeklong spiritual retreat, half of the sisters and priests attending are markedly overweight. At a national meeting of vocation directors, the number of overweight men is striking. In a residential treatment program for priests and religious with a range of psychological difficulties, more than a third of the clients are considerably overweight. At a gathering of major superiors, several men and women in leadership seek out the psychologist presenter and, in hushed tones, express their concern about the increasing number of obviously overweight members in their congregations. In a women's community, a novice regularly excuses herself after meals, goes to the bathroom, and then rejoins the group. A young priest often misses meals and exercises vigorously several times a day, despite being very thin; he becomes irritable and anxious if anything interferes with his exercise schedule.

Eating disorders may well be what alcohol abuse and dependence were forty or fifty years ago: the unmentionable addiction that was exacting a huge toll on the health and ministry of many men and women in priesthood and religious life. Now, several decades later, it hardly raises an eyebrow to learn that Father or Sister or Brother is in recovery from alco-

hol addiction or has taken a leave to get help for an alcohol problem. Religious life, like the larger society, has acknowledged the problem of alcoholism and fully supports and affirms those who struggle to overcome it. There is little shame or secrecy in addressing the problem of alcoholism openly. Indeed, one can say that the language and ethos of Alcoholics Anonymous (and of all twelve-step programs generally), of "recovery," of healthy "sobriety" versus white-knuckle "abstinence," have become part of the fabric of priesthood and religious life in many settings. This means that individuals in recovery from or addressing alcohol problems readily find support and affirmation.

Eating disorders seem to be now where alcohol abuse and dependence were several decades ago: the problem is there, most people see it's there, many people struggle personally with it, but no one acknowledges it openly, no one talks about it, and everyone seems to avoid mentioning the issue out of fear of intruding on another person's privacy or being indiscreet. Meanwhile, thousands of men and women suffer silently and, often, alone.

This article provides a brief introduction to the problem of eating disorders in priesthood and religious life (which, for the sake of brevity and flow, I will henceforth refer to as "religious life," while being

well aware of the numerous differences between the realities of diocesan priesthood and religious life). It begins with a description of the phenomenon, continues with consideration of several factors that contribute to eating disorders in society at large and in religious life in particular, and then looks at some of the psychological dynamics underlying eating disorders. This article simply hopes to name the problem and begin opening the door for constructive reflection on and response to it.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHENOMENON

Bulimia nervosa, anorexia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder immediately come to mind when we hear the expression “eating disorder.” Each of these conditions involves distorted attitudes about eating, shape, and weight, mood symptoms such as depression and anxiety, and, often, personality disorders. An eating disorder centers on a disordered relationship with food whereby an individual consistently engages in a particular pattern of behavior around food in order to alter his or her mood. For example, the caloric restriction and compulsive exercising of anorexia nervosa and the bingeing and purging of bulimia nervosa are patterns that produce an experience of control and of temporary relief from the stress of low self-esteem and relational difficulties. Similarly, compulsive overeating, particularly of “comfort foods” (sweets, carbohydrates, fast foods), is experienced as a way to soothe and fill the emotional “hunger” and emptiness inside without having to go to relationships for this “nourishment.” The pattern of consistently managing mood by turning to a substance or a pattern of behavior that reliably produces the desired “fix” is the hallmark of any addictive process. It can thus be useful to think of eating disorders as addictive relationships with food, in which food symbolizes and comes to function as much more than metabolic fuel for one’s physiological system. Obesity has been the subject of considerably less research and clinical attention than anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder, despite the fact that obesity accounts for far more morbidity and mortality than these three eating disorders combined. Writing in *Monitor on Psychology* (March 2002), psychologist Eric Stice points out that because body mass is a direct function of caloric intake relative to caloric expenditure, and because obese individuals consume more calories and exercise less than nonobese individuals, it is reasonable to conclude that a medical condition caused by excessive eating relative to caloric needs is a disorder of eating. I will therefore include obesity in the

group of eating disorders. Although all the eating disorders occur in priests and religious, this article will focus on obesity as the most prevalent and serious eating disorder among people in religious life.

Having said this, it is important to remember that not all cases of weight gain or obesity are indicative of an eating disorder. It is important to note that some medical conditions can cause obesity or significant weight gain (e.g., hypothyroidism, Cushing’s syndrome, depression, certain neurological problems) and that certain medications, including steroids and some antidepressants, can cause significant weight gain. However, in my clinical experience and that of many colleagues, the majority of cases of obesity in men and women religious cannot be attributed exclusively or even primarily to medical conditions; rather, they appear to involve eating disorders.

OVERWEIGHT VERSUS OBESE

For the sake of clarity, it is important to distinguish between the terms “overweight” and “obese.” Clinically speaking, being overweight means that one’s weight is 25 to 30 pounds over the recommended weight for height; being obese means that one’s weight is 30 or more pounds over the recommended weight for height. A more precise clinical measure of relative weight for height is body mass index (BMI), which is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. It is obtained through some simple calculations. BMI for normal weight is between 18.5 and 24.9, BMI for overweight is between 25.0 and 29.9, and BMI for obesity is 30.0 or greater.

Given the sensitive nature of this topic, especially outside of clinical settings, we often speak about people being overweight and may find it awkward to speak about obesity. In light of the definitions just given and your own experience, consider whether, in the first several sentences of this article, it would perhaps have been more accurate to use the term “obese” instead of “overweight.” Also, ask yourself if your reaction to reading those first several lines would have been different had I used “obese” right away. This brief reflection may give you some clues about how hard it is for us to find words to introduce comfortably the difficult issue of eating disorders, including obesity.

Some numbers may help put this issue into perspective. Recently released results from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) estimate that 61 percent of adults in the United States are either overweight or obese. Of importance, the findings further point out that whereas the number of overweight adults in the

Observation, experience show eating disorders are a significant problem among men and women religious

United States increased by only 2 percent (from 33 to 35 percent) between 1980 and 1999, the number of obese adults nearly doubled (from approximately 15 percent to nearly 30 percent). This means that almost a third of the adult population in the United States is clinically obese. Further research indicates that seven out of eight individuals with bulimia nervosa, anorexia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder are women. Nearly equal percentages of men and women in the general population are obese. At present, there are no statistics specifically defining the problem of obesity and other eating disorders in religious life. Nonetheless, observation and years of experience in clinical and educational work with priests and both men and women religious unmistakably point to a widespread and significant problem.

Before leaving office, former Surgeon General David Satcher issued a “call to action,” saying that in the United States some 300,000 deaths a year are related to obesity (a loss of American lives comparable to nearly 100 World Trade Center disasters every year). It is urgent, as a society, that we acknowledge and confront this major health crisis head on. We must move beyond reaching for the “quick fixes” touted by the booming diet industry and seriously explore the lifestyle issues at the root of the pervasive struggle with eating disorders. Satcher began by calling for the removal from schools of all fast food — a key contributor to eating disorders, particularly obesity.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DISORDERS

The pace of our culture, the ready availability of fast food and junk food, widespread poor eating habits, and the culturewide breakdown in healthy intimacy and relationality in society at large as well as in religious life are some of the primary factors

that leave so many people at risk for developing eating disorders. Ours has become a workaholic and nonreflective culture in which people rarely slow down long enough to take stock of what is happening with their emotional, spiritual, and relational well-being. The unrelenting intensity of the pace of daily life for everyone (working men and women, families, even overscheduled toddlers and children) — combined with the incessant bombardment of stimulation from all kinds of electric and electronic media — keeps people from slowing down and thus protects them from finding out what’s really going on inside themselves. In this climate, in which there is so little time to feel, to notice, to be aware, to make genuine affective connections with oneself and others, food has become for many a “language for feelings.” Food often ends up being used to numb the pain of difficult feelings or to fill the hole created inside by loneliness, isolation, lack of healthy relationships, and lack of intimacy. This sets the stage for food’s being used in addictive ways — that is, as a substance that reliably produces a change in mood and is intentionally used for this purpose — which in turn sets the stage for eating disorders.

In trying to understand eating disorders, and especially what has been called the current epidemic of obesity, some people have focused on the genetic factors (i.e., the inherited tendency to gain weight), almost as if to say, “It’s in your genes, so there’s not much you can do about it.” There is no disputing that some individuals have a genetic predisposition that makes them more likely than others to gain weight. Some clarification is in order, however, lest readers join those who think that obesity is entirely programmed by the genes. As Stice notes, the fact that the obesity rate in United States adults has risen from 4 percent to 30 percent in the past century suggests that genetic effects are being behaviorally modulated. That is, behavioral and lifestyle factors are mediating the expression of genes, which normally do not change so dramatically and quickly. Thus, when trying to explain the exponential increase in obesity over a few decades, we are left looking at the unhealthy lifestyle that has taken hold in our society: a far more sedentary existence for most people (despite an intense focus on exercise for some), the consumption of more calories than necessary to fuel this lifestyle, and the pursuit of taste and convenience ahead of nutrition, as encouraged by the fast-food industry.

Researchers agree that consumption of fast food is one of the biggest factors in the prevalence of obesity today. Eric Schlosser, journalist and author of *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (2002), points out that United States residents

spend more on fast food each year than they do on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and records combined. Consumers in this country spent more than \$110 billion on burgers, fried chicken, and the like in 2000 alone, compared with \$6 billion in 1970. Schlosser contends that the fast-food industry has changed the way Americans eat. I would add that this shift in American eating patterns and the increased reliance on fast food have become possible thanks to the interaction of several factors, including (1) the fact that in more families, both parents (or a single parent) are working full-time and thus have less time to cook regular meals for their families; (2) the increasing push (often compulsive) to “do” more and more things and to be involved in more and more activities, on top of increasingly time-absorbing work schedules, leaving even less time for families to gather around a shared, home-cooked meal once a day; and (3) the increasing fragmentation of family life, with each family member, even in “intact” families, rushing off individually to pursue this activity or that sporting event, diminishing their time together, especially at mealtimes.

FACTORS SPECIFIC TO RELIGIOUS LIFE

These general cultural factors seem to interact with several specific characteristics of contemporary religious life to increase the risk of eating disorders among men and women religious. First, socialization (from the general culture and from religious life itself) affects how religious are expected to cope with feelings. Our culture has typically socialized men not to express their feelings, not to appear vulnerable or in need emotionally, to appear strong and in control. Women have often been socialized to be caretakers and nurturers and not to pay much attention to their own needs for healthy nurturance. This social conditioning can make it difficult for people to recognize and express their own needs, especially for intimacy and connection. The problem is compounded when these individuals enter the context of religious life, which often instills a tendency to suppress negative affect, such as anger, frustration, and sadness. Also, religious life often fails to create an environment that provides much in the way of positive affect, including healthy experiences of intimacy, friendship, joy, shared laughter, closeness, support, and a sense of being on a shared faith journey. Finally, the “spiritual” expectation of what being a “good” religious or priest means often leaves individuals feeling unable to express openly what they really feel, experience, and need. This makes it much harder to develop a genuine spirituality grounded in honesty and healthy

intimacy with God, others, and oneself. In many religious life settings, the combination of cultural and religious socialization contributes to a situation in which neither negative nor positive affect is handled in a healthy way. This opens the way for food to be used as the language for emotions that are unexpressed or lacking.

Second, the fear of intimacy is often encountered in religious life, especially in individuals who have not developed good relational skills or who have an unhealed history (as many do) of being significantly hurt or betrayed in interpersonal relationships. Usually, fear of intimacy leads to avoidance of situations in which good relational skills could be developed, which means that the unrequited need for healthy intimate connecting grows, forming a hole inside, and opening the way for food to fill some part of that inner emptiness.

Third, a combination of overwork and lack of self-awareness is increasingly characteristic of many priests and religious. Everywhere one looks, sisters, brothers, and priests are extremely overworked, trying to cover positions that would require several individuals instead of one, trying to contribute within their own religious communities, and also trying to be present in the larger community, particularly as voices for justice and peace in troubling times. These overworked men and women typically come home exhausted, often too tired to exercise or even to cook a healthy meal. Frequently, they end up sitting and watching television and ordering out for food, or eating a take-out meal picked up on the way home, or grabbing a burger or slice of pizza at a drive-through en route between work and an evening meeting and not eating a proper meal once they get home. This scenario is repeated countless times every evening, among individuals living in community, and especially among priests and religious living alone (of whom there are more and more). Because of their hectic pace and excessive workloads, these people rush through the days with hardly a moment to notice the overall impact of their lifestyle on themselves and others. Several priests and religious have shared with me that they were hurtling along this destructive path of overwork, stress, poor diet, no exercise, and inadequate support, quite unaware of what was happening to them, until something significant — a heart attack before age 40, a diagnosis of cancer, serious back surgery, or the sudden loss of a close friend brought to an early grave by a similarly unhealthy lifestyle — finally grabbed their attention, caused them to open their eyes and look at themselves, and set them on a path of establishing a different kind of life. Sometimes the pattern of overworking, especially if

combined with a poverty of healthy intimacy in one's life, leads to a slide into genuine workaholism — a huge occupational hazard in religious life. In genuine workaholism, work is used to "fill" the inner hole and manage one's painful feelings, including sadness, isolation, anger, frustration, exhaustion, disappointment, and grief. Clinically, we know that when one addiction is present in an individual, a second one is often present. Among men and women religious, it is not unusual to see addictive relationships to both work and food, which serve as a way to "numb out" — to avoid sitting with the tiredness, loneliness, and pain and thus to avoid having to make changes in one's life. Addictive relationships to sexuality (including acting out with others and involvement with pornography, particularly on the Internet), to alcohol, and to spending are some other commonly observed responses to the stressful lifestyle typical of many priests and religious.

Fourth is the fact that, increasingly, diocesan priests are experiencing a disastrous degree of isolation because of their geographical distance from brother priests, the generational and ideological distances within rectories, and the burden of being alone to handle the needs and problems of hundreds of parishioners with little or no support, not even from their bishops. The profound sense of loneliness and disconnectedness takes a huge toll on these men, who inevitably seek some way to numb the pain — and who often find comfort in food, which is sometimes provided in excessive amounts by overzealous housekeepers or parishioners eager to "feed Father."

Finally, an impoverished or altogether absent spiritual life can contribute significantly to the risk of turning to food in an addictive way. When a man or woman, involved in relational ministry on behalf of a relational God, is not being nourished and sustained ("fed") by a primary relationship with God, the hole inside is bound to grow, painful feelings and questions like "What's the point?" are bound to multiply, and the risk of using food to manage the pain and needfulness is likely to increase.

DYNAMICS OF EATING DISORDERS

Research has shown that emotional distress may be the key to a number of metabolic problems related to food consumption. I would add that emotional distress, which typically has a relational basis, seems to be at the root of all disordered relationships with food. Research has shown that individuals' responses to significant emotional or environmental distress can affect their body chemistry in ways that alter normal mechanisms of food metabolism and of absorp-

tion and depletion of crucial nutrients. Clinical nutritionist Nancy Appleton, in her book *Healthy Bones*, points out that we all experience stress and stressors, and that it is not the stress per se that can alter our body chemistry. Rather, it is how we perceive the stressors and how we deal with them that determine whether they become distress for us. The more we become angry or depressed, put ourselves in a victim role, hold judgments against others, or try to get back at people, the more the stress in our lives becomes distress — and it is this distress that causes us problems.

Some important sources of stress and, often, distress — especially for individuals in religious life — are the areas of intimacy and nurturance, boundaries around self-care, and sexuality. In society at large and in religious life in particular, there is a tremendous hunger for nurturance and intimacy. One often sees individuals in religious life needing and seeking a lot of nurturance, having come from backgrounds in which it was not provided to them, and in which they did not learn adequate skills in this area. Add to this early deprivation the loneliness and isolation so many of them encounter in the course of their ministries, and you have a situation that would be challenging even for the most relationally skilled person, let alone for someone who has never learned to identify intimacy needs or to address them in healthy ways. Some have remarked that the widespread craving for sweets is an expression of an underlying craving for the sweetness of healthy intimacy. Sadly, many individuals in religious life do not know how to go to a place of healthy intimacy in their lives, or, because of the formation they received, misunderstand what healthy intimacy is and think they simply shouldn't go there. Yet they continue to crave it deeply. Judi Hollis, a psychologist with a specialty in eating disorders and the author of *Fat Is a Family Affair*, writes that individuals with eating disorders need to "relate to recover." She points out how unhealthy eating patterns become a substitute for true intimacy and for taking the risk of relating. An eating disorder thus becomes "a symbol of how we relate in the world." Issues of control and vulnerability are central in the lives of those who struggle with eating disorders. Contemporary life, including religious life, often leaves people feeling overwhelmed, out of control, isolated, and afraid of being vulnerable. Increasingly, people turn to food as a way of coping. As Hollis puts it, "the only way to get nurturance without being vulnerable is with food." Relating to food (or work, or alcohol) is always easier than relating to other people.

A second source of stress and distress, especially

for individuals in religious life, is in the area of boundaries — specifically, in holding healthy boundaries around one's own physical, emotional, and spiritual needs and limitations. This involves having the humility and courage to recognize both one's gifts and one's limitations and being able to say no when necessary: "No, I'm not able to take on another project in the parish, but I can direct you to someone who would be excellent for this." "No, I cannot stay up and edit this paper tonight, as much as I'd like to; I really need to get some sleep." "No, I will not agree to a last-minute invitation to speak to a local group this Sunday afternoon. I really need to honor my afternoon of prayer and retreat." How difficult it is to speak these words — especially for hard-working ministers who have never learned or been encouraged to set limits and boundaries on their time, energies, and availability and who are accustomed to doing extra things that they really do not want to be doing, losing sight of their own needs, limits, and boundaries in the process. As a religious priest friend recently said to me, "Many of us have a great relationship with our yes, but absolutely no relationship with our no." Establishing healthy boundaries is not about selfishly refusing to be of service; it is about being free to serve better by honoring the particular instrument God has made one to be. A lack of boundaries around self-care and respecting one's own reality inevitably leads to an accumulation of frustration, anger, resentment, exhaustion, and sometimes self-blame, which can easily lead to reaching for food as a way of comforting and rewarding oneself — especially when one feels unable to rescue oneself by starting the challenging work of setting good boundaries.

UNDERSTANDING SEXUALITY

A third area of frequent stress and distress is that of sexuality, which often ends up getting linked to food — especially for religious, and particularly for women religious. Often, the expression of affection, caring, and desire, which is particularly important for women, somehow ends up being labeled inappropriate or unnecessary. There is a definite connection between the denied need for affective, sensual warmth and for being deeply touched in relationship (not only or even primarily at a physical level) and the use of food as a substitute source of gratification, pleasure, comfort, and distraction from the unmet needs. In addition, some individuals have received the message that, as religious or priests, they are simply not to be sexual persons. Those who hear this message and who lack a good understanding of what

sexuality is primarily about (healthy relational living) and whose own sexuality is not well-integrated may be highly uncomfortable with the possibility of being seen as an attractive, sexual person and may end up "hiding" behind a great deal of excess weight. As clinicians, many of us have heard our religious and priest clients say that they would prefer not to lose weight in order to avoid dealing with sexual-attractiveness issues. Many people still enter religious life perceiving it as a safe haven where they can altogether avoid the issue of sexuality, especially if they have had painful past experiences around sexuality. Consider that at least 40 percent of women religious have a history of sexual abuse, and that many men do as well, and consider that shame is a powerful and tough emotion often associated with histories of abuse (especially when healing work has not yet been done). When individuals begin using food to manage the shame associated with their sexuality, the conditions are ripe for an addictive spiral of numbing the pain with food, feeling more shame because of the food addiction, eating more to numb the shame, and so on downward.

An additional psychological dynamic to bear in mind in understanding eating disorders in religious life is the high prevalence of compulsive and dependent personality styles among priests and religious. Individuals with a markedly compulsive personality style have a strong need to do things right, to have the correct answer, to make sure everything is in order (at least externally), and to accomplish assigned tasks immediately and well; they often show some lack of flexibility in how situations are understood, directives implemented, and change introduced. Individuals with a markedly dependent personality style have a strong need to please others (especially authority figures), to be guided and told what to do, and to be reassured and affirmed in what they are doing; they often struggle to take a stand on their own, to express an opinion that diverges from the commonly held one, or to take risks of any sort that might jeopardize their relationships with those on whom they rely for support.

A moderate degree of compulsive and dependent traits is actually quite adaptive and helpful to individuals in religious life; people who lack these traits in moderation would find it difficult to function comfortably in the culture of religious life. When these traits are strongly present, however, they can contribute to unhealthy patterns of functioning. In relation to eating disorders, individuals with compulsive styles are more likely to engage in compulsive overeating (or compulsive food restriction, in the case of anorexia nervosa) in order to cope with the

kinds of emotional issues discussed earlier. Not surprisingly, when these same individuals enter programs to treat their obesity and related emotional issues, they often set out to lose more weight than they should, faster than they should, in their need to be “good” patients and to do the program the “right” way. Similarly, individuals with a dependent style may successfully keep weight off for a while after treatment, in their need to earn the approval and affirmation of their superiors. However, both compulsive and dependent individuals may struggle to sustain weight reversals (loss or gain) attained in therapy when the external reinforcement of others’ approval and affirmation is no longer as readily available because of a change in situation or assignment. Recovery work for these individuals needs to include their becoming aware of how their personality style contributes to their difficulties and how to take it into account in developing effective strategies for healing and long-term recovery.

Clearly, some of the major psychological dynamics that contribute to eating disorders include ongoing experiences of lack of intimacy and nurturance, struggles to maintain healthy boundaries around self-care, and difficulties in finding ways to live a healthy sexuality in a vowed celibate context. These struggles can lead individuals to the painful and disappointing conclusion that other people will not always be there for them or meet all of their needs in perfect ways, and that at times they may even be let down or hurt by others. When this conclusion causes individuals to live as if they could nurture themselves adequately without needing others, an illusion of emotional self-sufficiency emerges, setting the stage for a disordered use of food to meet emotional needs. As Hollis points out, the key to recovery from any eating disorder is finding ways to meet one’s needs (for emotional nurturance, affirmation, healthy sexual expression, good self-care) without relying on food. This frees one to redefine one’s relationship to food, to return to healthy socializing around meals, and to allow food to “just be food” again — primarily a source of metabolic energy for living and, occasionally, a source of culinary pleasure. The way out of eating disorders is to face interpersonal disappointments and hurts, to express one’s feelings about them instead of holding in those feelings and managing them through food, and to realize that others do and will care, albeit imperfectly, and will provide support and nurturance even if they don’t solve one’s every problem or fill one’s every need. Hollis states that facing disappointments is a way to grow up. Recovery is a lot about growing up by confronting those areas of one’s life that are most painful and challenging. For some,

undertaking this work of “growing up” relationally may seem too daunting until they understand that it is work to be undertaken with plenty of support and care. In fact, it needs to unfold in the context of healthy relationships, which help one to address the pain and to come through it rather than persist in trying to numb it. Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon beautifully express the nature of this important work of healing and growth in their book *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration*:

In close, intimate relationships, the best and worst in us are brought to the fore, providing us with a unique opportunity for transformation in the give-and-take that such encounters involve. [Intimate relationships] force us to grow up, challenging us where we are stuck in old but familiar self-images and patterns of self-centeredness. Intimacy brings us face-to-face with those shadow parts of ourselves that we tend to deny and project onto others, revealing to us “that which we have no wish to be.” When intimacy is accompanied by love, it can become a crucible for our wholeness, stirring up what needs to be integrated and holding us in love as we meet those parts of ourselves which we have feared and hated. (p. 114)

Thus, the addictive relationship to food that is so widespread becomes a symptom of what has gone terribly wrong in the past few decades, in our society and in religious life, in the areas of healthy intimacy and relational living. The key to preventing and recovering from eating disorders is to redefine not only one’s relationship with food but also one’s relationships with oneself, others, and God.

RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM

The following recommendations are offered to help readers, especially those in leadership and in formation work, address the problem of eating disorders.

Start to name the reality of eating disorders (particularly obesity) courageously and gently, as an important step in acknowledging the seriousness of the issue, in supporting individuals in need of healing in this area, and in assessing ways, as a group, to respond to it — for the sake of the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of members and of the group as a whole. Speaking plainly, directly, and compassionately helps to normalize the problem for those who may be struggling with it. By breaking the silence around the issue and addressing it openly, you can help others recognize they are not alone in their struggle and implicitly give them permission to seek help.

Assess the “health” of your system. Research has shown that eating disorders are most usefully understood in systemic terms — as the “patient” with the disorder expressing something on behalf of the “family” system as a whole. It would thus be opportune for religious communities, formation communities, dioceses and deaneries to take stock of the health of their own systems: of the extent to which there is healthy support and nurturance that goes around, of the degree of isolation among ministers, of the extent to which overwork is exacting a toll on individuals.

Provide opportunities for education on eating disorders, their prevalence, issues related to them, resources available for addressing the problem, and on ways to develop healthy intimacy and good relational skills. It is important to begin providing this kind of input early in formation, in order to instill as soon as possible habits that will support a healthy religious or priestly lifestyle.

Challenge your members, students, and peers to strive for wholeness and “un-numbing,” to move into the fullness of life God intended for them, and to come fully into their gifts and talents. These gifts may never fully emerge unless they are called forth in supportive, encouraging, and positively challenging ways. Of course, if leaders and formators are to call others to wholeness and even to greatness, they must first confront, and humbly commit themselves to addressing, the areas of numbness within their own lives.

Renew your commitment to prophetic gospel witness. Consecrated men and women are called to be prophetic — and, thus, often countercultural — witnesses to gospel realities in the midst of a world in great need of alternative, life-giving messages. It would be worth reflecting on the prevalence of eating disorders in religious life as one symptom (the problem of sexual misconduct being another) of the extent to which, in certain respects, religious life has gone the way of the wider society and has been unable to embody and to privilege radically alternative commitments to true community, genuine intimacy, and authentic living in right relationship. If, in terms of healthy relational living, society is hurtling down the track on a runaway train, does religious life have to follow suit? Can it develop enough self-awareness to witness to an alternative reality rooted in gospel values? When men and women dedicated to being ministers of a relational God and bearers of gospel truths are not sustained within their own communities and presbyteries, when they fall victim to the same symptoms of relational breakdown that are hobbling society, does the salt risk going flat? If it does, who will restore it? At this time, when the call to be salt and

light is more urgent than ever, may leaders, formators, and brothers and sisters on the journey have the courage, generosity, and care necessary to begin addressing the serious issue of eating disorders and the toll it is taking, thereby contributing to creating a more nourishing and viable reality for religious life and priesthood.

We can definitely speak of a crisis of intimacy in our society and in religious life, with the epidemic of eating disorders being one of its most serious symptoms. The danger is that this crisis may continue to be left unnamed and unaddressed, with increasingly serious consequences for the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of countless individuals in religious life and, eventually, for the well-being of religious life itself.

As the wisdom of the Chinese language teaches us, every crisis contains both danger and opportunity. The opportunity is for individuals struggling with eating disorders, as well as for their leaders, to take up the challenge of looking long and hard at what needs to be renewed, redirected, and reconfigured so that priesthood and religious life can increasingly become realities that deeply nurture their members — that truly embody a relational lifestyle and ministry that prophetically (counterculturally) witnesses to a God who is relationship and who calls each person into fullness of life through healthy relational living.

RECOMMENDED READING

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Wellness and Illness

James Torrens, S.J.

Those Breathless Years

The best thing about my asthma
is now barely to remember
those egg-and-wheat-less years,

the hundred and one nights
up on featherproof pillows,
each gulp of air a gasp,

and the doctor's anteroom,
stuffy and stony silent,
while the lion rumbled within.

Dust was the enemy, and pets
and scampering with my cousins
around homes under construction.

A night in a tent in the fog
came near doing me in.
Then they found the right medicine.

Near forty I began to run
and run, so eager to catch up,
though later I pulled up lame.

Oh the patience of mothers!
Illness trains you upon yourself,
but you learn what you can't control.

Driving the Los Angeles freeways, I find it remarkable that all those cars, at breakneck speed, get where they are going most of the time without incident. Good health is like that, too; it's highly unlikely, when you think of it. An old philosophic adage gives this gloomy assessment: *Bonum ex integra causa, malum e quocumque defectu* (translated loosely: "To be good, everything has to click together; it turns bad at the slightest defect").

How astoundingly intricate is the mortal body, the human composite. That means an endless number of possible glitches. The more that biology and medical science learn about us, the more subspecialties spring up to deal with anomalies. For instance, in regard to heart health, one almost has to be a nurse or pharmacist to understand the lingo about cholesterol, triglycerides, LDL particles, and half a dozen other factors. When people get to comparing ailments, it makes the head spin.

The wonder is how many of us go along feeling reasonably well, even robust, for long periods. We hold up; we work pretty much as the Creator intended, even when we put ourselves, or life puts us, under severe strain. Nonetheless, illnesses or injury can await just around the corner. They are facts of life, often deeply distressing, especially when they afflict the young. The children's wards and units of big hos-

pitals, as cheery as they are made to look and as upbeat as the attendants manage to be, weigh heavily on the spirit.

The illness of others is not easy to face. So visiting the sick is easy to put off or skip, especially for those with full agendas and high productivity. Thank goodness, the surge of lay parish ministry and of service programs in schools has brought more attention to shut-ins, those in convalescent homes, and the hospitalized. My own best example of such ministry comes from a fellow Jesuit, always among the first for a hospital visit to a confrere, faculty member, or familiar student. His visits, not long, are a mix of the prayerful and the cheerful.

An illness brings our humanity into play in a distinct way. It lets us know a lot about ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses; it forces us to acknowledge that we lack omnipotence; it can drive us to an unvisited depth. Of course, we have to get over the initial shock.

A long time ago, during theology studies in Louvain, I went to the emergency room of the antiquated city hospital because of an abdominal cramp. Two women were there, I remember, speaking in Flemish. One, large and bulky, like some of the women we saw working the fields outside town, was groaning uncontrollably. The other, thin and haggard, obviously familiar with hospitals, explained to me later in French, with a kind of smile, that the woman had never been sick before. She didn't know how to handle it.

Chronic illness — along with a day-by-day familiarity with pain, or anxiety about its possible onset — can understandably sap the spirit. A certain gloom or depletion, a tentativeness, an habitual self-concern can cloud one's days. Quite often, though, we are surprised by the good spirits of someone we know as chronically unwell. A cousin of mine, living outside Detroit, had a wife suffering from asthma. I remember that in the humid season, though visibly afflicted, she would not diminish her labors in the kitchen nor her flow of good humor. She was one of those rare people always asking others how they were and brushing off inquiries about herself. I still consider this a triumph of grace.

With an illness that we judge critical, the same miracle of faith can happen. You go to visit someone in the hospital, hoping to help that person buck up a little, only to end up buoyed and benefited yourself. Something of the sort happens at Lourdes. People travel long distances, often at great physical cost, with some hope of bettering their health, but their belief is bolstered by the fervor of everyone else. Where Our Lady has intervened (and still does, every

“Love is the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the cross of Jesus Christ.” Yes, to man and woman, to young and old.

so often) for a healing in the waters, genuine religious awe and devotion take over. People return from Lourdes without palpable healing but with high hearts.

There is something providential about illness; it stops us in our tracks and makes us reassess. It tells us that we are not running the world after all. The care that others give us reminds us that we matter not because of what we accomplish but because of who we are: beloved children of God, whatever our condition. When we are ill, our rhythm has to slow; our fists have to open out; we have to say, however reluctantly, “Be it done to me as you will.” Yes, we even have to let others tend and help us. I was so impressed by my mother — very much a take-charge person — when, in her closing decade, she yielded the reins, quite ready to be cared for.

Wellness, in the holistic sense — good diet, exercise, checkups, positive thinking — is a central concern these days. Good sense, as well as honesty about our abuse of the body, calls for an effort at wellness. Still, our concern can pass over into preoccupation and even obsession. This can be guilt-inducing: if you're sick, it has to be your fault. A recent Vatican document, *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the New Age*, contains this comment: “Some New Age writers view suffering as self-imposed or as bad karma or at least as a failure to harness one's own resources.” The text offers a more Christological perspective: “[Each person] is called to share in that suffering through which all

human suffering has also been redeemed" (*Letter of the Pontifical Councils for Culture and Interreligious Dialogue*, 3 February 2003).

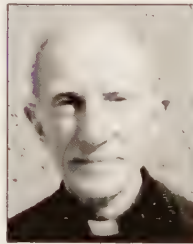
After all, even our best efforts are no warranty of health. We are not guaranteed safe passage across a busy street or immunity to the hovering virus. We walk always with reminders of the fragility of life — holding it lightly, with gratitude, aware of being in divine hands.

Naturally, when we are ill, we don't just frequent the doctor's office and shell out money for prescriptions; we also pray earnestly to be well. Our Lord assures us that a persistent prayer will be answered: "I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9). The sacrament of the sick can confer healing, we know, and those for whom we pray often recover from dire accidents or come out well from risky operations.

But there is a problem. A storm of prayers for someone suffering from cancer or AIDS can all too often seem to go unanswered. Does God really deliver as promised? Will God, who lets nature take its way, provide for me when my health goes haywire? Occasionally, yes. We can recall that in the moving 38th chapter of Isaiah, the prophet told King Hezekiah, "You are about to die; you shall not recover." Hezekiah prayed earnestly and wept bitterly. And God responded through Isaiah that his prayer was heard and his healing granted. Hezekiah ranks among the special cases, which have proved numerous. But what about the ordinary cases? The answer, I believe, can be found in Luke: "If you, who are

wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (11:13). In other words, if we pray, our tender and compassionate Father will always be offering us the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit helps us to the right perspective, aids us both to fight and to accept, and enlightens us to the really big picture, with its promise of lasting life.

Today, as much as yesterday, we draw consolation from the many gospel accounts of Christ's compassionate healing. In the "Editor's Page" of the Fall 2002 edition, the founding editor of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, long a champion of wellness on every level, pointed us back to the essential: that to confront the mystery of suffering is to turn to the mystery of the cross. His thoughts on the matter happen to reflect his response to his own grave illness. It is caught in these words he quotes from the 1984 apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris* ("On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering"): "Love is the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the cross of Jesus Christ." Yes, to man and woman, to young and old.



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Coping with Everyday Stress

James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.

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No one can escape stress; it enters our lives daily. At times we experience it in mild and brief forms: we miss a bus, have to address an audience, or have to wait in line for gas. Sometimes it is felt only to a moderate degree and can last for hours or days, as when we find ourselves overworked, playing host to a flu virus, or upset over a heated argument. In its severe form, stress can plague us for weeks, months, or even years. Examples of high-stress situations include a financial catastrophe, the death of someone dear, or a disease we suffer chronically.

Some authors in the fields of psychology and psychiatry divide stress responses into two types. In his book *Holistic Medicine: From Stress to Optimal Health*, Dr. Kenneth Pelletier describes a Type I stress response as one that is perfectly normal, of brief duration, and usually occurring when the source of stress is immediate, identifiable, and resolvable. When such an event takes place, a number of transient physiologic changes occur concomitantly. Blood pressure becomes elevated, and fatty acids, glucose,

and the hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine increase in the blood. The heart works harder to pump more blood per minute, and the sympathetic branch of the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system is called into action. As soon as a Type I stress situation is resolved, the body eases into a period of compensatory relaxation, and the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system takes over. (Its healing effect is called a parasympathetic rebound.) Dr. Herbert Benson has designated this mechanism the relaxation response. His best-selling book (with the same name) has helped millions to reduce the level of stress in their lives in a virtually effortless way. Ordinary physical exercise also elicits a Type I response, and each time it is terminated, it results in the relaxation response that Benson, Pelletier, and others recommend so strongly for the maintenance of optimal health.

In the Type II stress response, all the bodily changes mentioned above remain abnormally elevated for a prolonged period of time. This happens whenever stressors are not experienced as immediate, identifiable, and resolvable. Perhaps the majority of the significant stressors in our lives are of this type: vague and continuing unresolved for weeks or longer. The body remains in a geared-up state, prepared for fighting or fleeing, as if life itself were being threat-

Stressful life events may well be less important than how individuals deal with the events

ened — even when the actual threat to the person's well-being is relatively minor. Since the physiologic effects are prolonged, transient blood pressure elevation can become hypertension (the forerunner of strokes), and increased heart rate can result in tachycardia (an early sign of cardiac disease). No adequate period of parasympathetic rebound is experienced to allow the vital functions to return to rest at or below their normal baseline. The longer a Type II stress response continues, the greater the likelihood that a stress-related illness will develop. Migraine headaches, heart attacks, peptic ulcers, arthritis, and strokes are all too often the outcome.

STRESS DISEASES

The connection between emotional stress and disease has not always been as appreciated as it is now. For many years after Louis Pasteur had established the so-called germ theory, doctors and patients viewed bacteria, virus particles, and other types of microorganisms as being the simple cause of most forms of physical illness. But later scientific writers, such as biomedical specialist George L. Engel, began to regard the presence of germs as merely a necessary condition for disease, not the cause of it. Today, the earlier single-cause concept has been replaced by the perception that the genesis of diseases — ranging across the full miserable spectrum, from head colds to cholera — is often either psychosomatic or multiple-caused. Increasing numbers of contemporary researchers, in agreement with Engel and Pelletier, are currently adopting the view that psychosocial and physical (or organic) elements together give rise to pathology.

Fitting into this modern conceptualization is a recognition of stress as, in Pelletier's words, the "single most important factor predisposing an individual

toward the development of disorder." But in their research, Hans Selye and Eric Cassell have demonstrated that the same stressors that contribute to the harm of their passive victims are actively handled by others in ways that render those stressors neutral or even beneficial. James Barrell of the University of Florida and Donald Price of the National Institutes of Health have also found that stressful life events (negative stressors) may well be less important than the ways in which individuals deal with them. When these researchers applied electric stimuli to the bodies of their human subjects, they found that half the participants in the experiment were confronters whose psychologic predisposition prompted them to prepare themselves actively for the stressor. The other half, the avoiders, attempted to escape the distressful situation through denial (i.e., unconscious refusal to face up to the unpleasant reality). Interestingly, the avoiders, when encountering the events that threatened them, displayed an elevated heart rate that probably resulted from fear or anxiety. The confronters, on the other hand, who actively prepared for the stressor, automatically tensed their muscles (in a way the passive avoiders did not) but did not demonstrate a similar speedup of heart rate.

The researchers believe that the muscle response is related to a normal increase in bodily activity that develops on occasions when a person needs to search out and cope with situations that involve threat. A person who, under stressful circumstances, passively or avoidingly allows his or her heart rate to become elevated significantly for extended periods of time is eventually likely to develop a severe cardiovascular disease. The results of experiments of this sort suggest strongly that the ways in which individuals learn to manage stress are, as Pelletier states, "more critical to [their] well-being than any impossible and undesirable attempts to avoid stress."

CHANGES BRING STRESS

Still, many people erroneously believe that the less stress they experience in life, the healthier they will be. Selye, whose pioneering insights into stress are known worldwide, has repeatedly insisted that the absolute quantity of stress a person experiences is considerably less important than the individual's temperament. Those who push or are forced to go against their nature (including many people in religious life) are found most likely to develop stress-related illnesses, ranging from chronic headaches to heart attacks and perhaps even cancer.

Research indicates that there are many people who deserve to be called stress seekers. These individ-

uals are thought to be addicted to the adrenal hormones (epinephrine and norepinephrine) that are secreted in abundance when stressful situations are encountered and that result in an elevated affective state (elation). It was this type of person that Selye had in mind when he told an interviewer from *U.S. News & World Report* (21 March 1977), "If a person is a stress seeker . . . and his body is falling apart, the last thing I would ever prescribe is that he be imprisoned on a beach for three months. He will do nothing but run up and down the beach and think about Wall Street. He might as well *be* on Wall Street and learn to accept the type of person he is and develop the disciplines that will help him live in harmony with the stress of his life."

Another important thing to keep in mind for the person who is trying to cope effectively with life's inevitable stresses, particularly if he or she holds an active, influential, service-oriented position, is that the individual who undergoes too much adaptation in too brief a time is predisposed to illness. It hardly matters whether the events affecting his or her life are felt to be negative (e.g., an injury, a rejection) or positive (e.g., a promotion, an inheritance); the accumulation of life changes over a relatively short period of time may constitute a major threat to that person's health. Recalling researcher Beth Pesznecker's observation that she and her colleagues found the best predictor of subsequent health status to be the magnitude of life change, it is not hard to comprehend the connection between the abrupt elevation of Albino Luciani to the papacy as John Paul I in 1978, and his unexpected and sudden death from a heart attack just 19 addresses and 33 days later.

STATISTICS CAN MISLEAD

Despite the widely publicized, innovative studies conducted by Dr. Richard Rahe and Dr. Thomas Holmes in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Washington, which dramatically presented the relationship between the frequency of socially stressful life changes (e.g., change of job or residence, loss of parent) and the onset of illness, other evidence calls for caution in predicting that many and frequent changes in a person's life, even within a brief time span, will precipitate sickness. This caveat emerges from a valuable research project conducted by Dr. Harold Wershow and Dr. George Reinhart of the University of Alabama, who found that a significant number of patients with no recognizable changes in their lives became ill and needed hospitalization. Their findings do not negate the earlier recognition that there is a strong link between

stressful life events and illness. Rather, we are taught by such work that when researchers like Rahe and Holmes statistically average their data, it is inevitable that the variability among individuals will become obscured. In other words, when Rahe and Holmes concluded that a series of changes occurring within a short period of a person's life is likely to result in illness, they may have implied, but would not be accurate in maintaining, that such a life experience must inevitably result in illness. In other words, whatever is statistically likely to happen to most people will not necessarily happen to you or me — but we would be foolish to ignore the odds.

HORMONAL LINKAGE

How does it happen that emotionally stressful events in a person's life set the stage for physical illness? The physiologic scenario is a fascinating but somewhat complicated one. It was Selye who first popularized the fact that all forms of stress result in the secretion of certain substances (hormones and steroids) into the bloodstream. These include epinephrine, norepinephrine, adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), and cortisone. ACTH and cortisone, which flow from the cortex of the adrenal gland, play an essential role in the body's positive adaptation to stressful conditions of short duration. When the period of stress is prolonged, however, they effect a decrease in the level of white blood cells (lymphocytes) that should be available to engage in protective combat with the invading bacteria, virus particles, or other harmful microorganisms. Illness occurs when the attackers overwhelm these defenders — a very real possibility when the stress response is Type II (the prolonged variety described earlier). In other words, immunity is decreased when stress becomes chronic and the body's natural response to assault is inhibited. Even the growth of malignant tumors has been suspected to be related to this suppression of the body's immune mechanisms.

STRESS REDUCTION

Situations and events in the environment surrounding us, and even conditions existing within us, are neutral. They become stressful only when we appraise them in a negative way. In other words, for a stress response to occur, a person must become aware of an external or internal reality that calls into question his or her ability to cope with the event successfully and painlessly.

Any of the following can result in stress if a person perceives them as situations with which he or she

cannot readily cope, or that are likely to cause that person pain, or that are likely to lower his or her self-esteem: (1) Someone points a revolver at the person, who assumes it is loaded. (2) A vivid fantasy of severely injuring someone preoccupies the individual's mind. (3) An unexpected telegram is delivered to the person in the middle of the night.

It is "a perception of threat or expectation of future discomfort that arouses, alerts, or otherwise activates the organism [and thereby elicits the stress reaction]," as psychologists Robert Woolfolk and Frank Richardson have observed. In their book *Stress, Sanity, and Survival*, they present a useful model of stress that consists of three levels: Level I, a person's external or internal environment; Level II, appraisal and evaluation of events in that environment; and Level III, a reaction (stress) that includes both emotional and physiologic arousal. The authors emphasize the point that it is an individual's *belief* that negative personal consequences will result from an event in his or her environment that actually causes stress. Emotional and physiologic arousal follows automatically once such a negative appraisal has been made.

CHOICE OF LEVELS

To achieve a reduction of stress in our life situations, deliberate intervention should be initiated at any of the three levels just mentioned. At Level I, an alteration in a person's environment can sometimes be effected in an effort to prevent the occurrence of events that are likely to result in stress. For example, a pastor could deliberately avoid an encounter with a parishioner whose attitude or behavior generally proves irritating. A change in lifestyle or a resolution of intrapersonal conflicts could achieve stress reduction at this first level.

At Level II, it is often possible to diminish or prevent stress by intentionally changing our perceptions and evaluations of the situations, events, and behavior (others' and our own) that have an effect on us. We can alter the assumptions, beliefs, and ways of thinking that result in disruption of our sense of well-being or our health. For instance, a person can learn to cease thinking that the actions of others (e.g., their driving, typing, manner of speaking) must measure up to his or her own perfectionist standards of performance. A person can choose to stop thinking about the behavior of others (as well as his or her own) in a judgmental, condemning, and disparaging way, and can learn to think acceptingly and tolerantly about realities he or she would otherwise perceive as negative and self-distressing.

At Level III, in which emotionally distressful and potentially damaging physiologic effects are produced, a person can voluntarily weaken the connection between the situation or event perceived at Level II and the body arousal generated at Level III. It is important to keep in mind that the physiologic and emotional effects we are attempting to prevent or diminish are physical realities. So, if we can stop the body from reacting in painful and self-destructive ways, we will be intervening successfully at this ultimate level. Physicians often prescribe tranquilizing medications in order to accomplish this sort of blocking. Valium or Librium, when taken before an event that is likely to elicit considerable anxiety and tension, can usually prevent such a stressful experience. But since there are less hazardous ways of intervening at Level III, many physicians consider such use of tranquilizers generally unwarranted. They know that drugs like Valium are potentially addictive, increase the likelihood of irregular heart rhythm in some individuals, and fail to resolve the psychologic situation underlying the anxiety, even when they prove to be calming. These doctors, along with other therapists, recommend a wide variety of equally helpful stress-reduction techniques including transcendental meditation, Benson's relaxation response, progressive muscular relaxation, yoga practice, and physical exercise.

The variety of practical ways in which steps can be taken to intervene successfully at these three levels have been presented in a number of recent books, including *Stress and Coping* by Alan Monat and Richard Lazarus and *The Natural Ways to Stress Control* by Sidney Lecker. The remainder of this article will focus briefly on the various techniques aimed at stress reduction at Level III, so that the reader will have at least some sense of the manifold ways in which it can be achieved.

RELAXATION IS THE KEY

The effect of the approaches that are used as alternatives to tranquilizers in heading off emotional distress (or decreasing it if it is too late for prevention) is simply to provide a sustained period of diminished sympathetic (nervous) activity with an accompanying increase in parasympathetic functioning. Activation of the sympathetic nervous system, characteristic of the fight-or-flight response (made famous by physiologist Walter Cannon), results in dilated pupils, elevated blood pressure, accelerated heart rate, faster and deeper breathing, and many other physical changes. Stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system, on the other hand, pro-

motes relaxation of the skeletal muscles, decreased blood pressure, slowing of the heart and breathing rate, and constriction of the pupils of the eyes. This latter process is restorative and healing for the mind and the body — which, it should always be remembered, can never be simultaneously in a state of relaxation and stress. In other words, by maintaining physical relaxation, we prevent our being aroused by stressful emotions, and by deliberately achieving a state of relaxation, we eliminate existing stress. The following strategies all aim at achieving the constructive emotional and physiologic conditions that are found in peaceful or tranquil relaxation.

TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

The term *meditation*, as popularly used these days, is sometimes confusing to people in religious life. Those of us who were taught to meditate as a form of prayer are generally inclined to think of the activity as spiritual and related to consideration of some divine mystery or event in the life of Jesus Christ. But in its current secular usage, meditation simply signifies an exercise through which a person achieves mastery over the process of attention. Such mastery allows a person to experience at will a so-called altered state of consciousness. This implies that the meditating person lets go of his or her ordinary way of screening, processing, and classifying stimuli and selectively focuses attention on perceiving those stimuli directly. Concentration is an essential element in the process. When a person meditates successfully, he or she voluntarily controls the information-processing mechanisms of the mind, including those responsible for a major part of the stress that individual experiences.

In the 1960s transcendental meditation (TM) became popular throughout the United States and made its way (twice a day for 20 minutes) into the lives of tens of thousands of disciples of the Indian guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, its chief commercial proponent. The simple techniques he teaches have been described in a vast array of books, pamphlets, magazines, and newspapers published from coast to coast. It is doubtful whether there is any adult in this country who has not in some way become familiar with the mantra that is privately bestowed by a TM teacher upon his or her pupil and which is to be silently or audibly spoken repetitiously as a way of focusing attention and establishing quiet as the state of consciousness. Practice gradually facilitates the achievement of a condition of heightened awareness. Inside, the person is fully awake; at the same time, he or she is relatively unaware of outside stimuli. The

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method is called transcendental because it enables the individual to go beyond wakeful experiences to an emotionally healing state of restfulness and elevated alertness.

The physiologic response underlying this transcendental awareness is what Benson refers to as the relaxation response. At Harvard's Thorndyke Memorial Laboratory, he and his colleagues developed a technique for eliciting the bodily condition that underlies TM and all the other popular forms of meditation. By achieving this physical state, one causes the body to counteract the biochemical changes that accompany the fight-or-flight (stress) response. Learning to meditate and attain this relaxation response can enable a person to prevent or diminish the development of the stress response (Level III) when he or she is confronted with a potentially anxiety-provoking situation.

The relaxation response, Benson has shown, causes a variety of physiologic changes to occur: heart and breathing rates decrease, as does oxygen consumption; alpha brain waves (associated with calm, pleasant, alert, meditative, and introspective experiences) increase; blood pressure and muscle tension decrease. All of these changes move in the direction of calming the body. However, eliciting the relaxation response is not merely a matter of sitting quietly with your eyes closed, and the changes that take place are not identical with those that characterize the state of sleep.

RELAXATION RESPONSE

Benson's method calls for a quiet, undistracting environment, a mental device on which to concentrate, a passive attitude, and a comfortable posture. A word or phrase, which is the equivalent of the TM

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mantra, is repeated over and over while attention is fastened on the normal rate of breathing. Sitting comfortably in a relaxed manner is generally more effective than lying down, which is too conducive to sleep. To achieve the relaxation response through Benson's method, one must (1) sit quietly and comfortably, (2) close one's eyes, (3) deeply relax all muscles, beginning with the feet and progressing upward to the face, (4) keep the muscles relaxed, (5) breathe through the nose and be aware of one's breathing, (6) breathe easily and at a natural rate, silently saying the word one with each exhalation, (7) continue for ten to twenty minutes, and (8) when finished, sit quietly for a few minutes, first with eyes closed, later with eyes open. He recommends that the individual not think about whether a deep level of relaxation is being achieved. Benson promises that if the technique is practiced once or twice daily, the response will come with very little effort. One caution is mentioned: the method should not be used within two hours after eating a meal, since the digestive processes tend to prevent the elicitation of the relaxation response.

Much more can be learned about how to achieve the relaxation response in Benson's book, but a trained instructor or licensed clinician can generally be even more helpful. Complications can arise, as with all self-regulatory techniques, when relaxation techniques are undertaken improperly or without adequate supervision, or when the following contraindications (warning signs) are ignored: (1) an impending, occurring, or recent heart attack; (2) transient blood pressure elevations that need to be monitored; (3) diabetic conditions; (4) hypoglycemia (low blood sugar); (5) glaucoma; (6) involutional psychotic reaction (severe depression in late middle age); (7) paranoia (a mental disorder characterized by delusional thinking, such as persecution or grandios-

ity); and (8) dissociative episodes (in which emotions are disconnected from an idea, situation, or object). The specific reasons for each of the above contraindications are based on solid research data.

PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

Another self-regulatory technique that is used to prevent and decrease stress, as well as to treat psychosomatic disorders, is known as progressive muscular relaxation. Dr. Edmund Jacobsen developed this program, which consists of systematically tensing and then relaxing the various muscle groups throughout the body, to teach people to learn to attend to and discriminate between the resulting sensations of tension and relaxation. Easy return to a state of deep relaxation becomes possible if the learner practices the technique for a period of fifteen or twenty minutes once or twice daily. The method is clearly described in Jacobsen's book *You Must Relax*.

In *Progressive Relaxation Training: A Manual for Helping Professions*, Dr. Douglas Bernstein and Dr. Thomas Borkovec have presented a useful summary of the method that Dr. Joseph Wolpe developed to teach relaxation to individuals troubled by general anxiety, muscular tension, and neuromuscular disorders (e.g., spasms), as well as to people involved in physical rehabilitation. The sequence Wolpe has designed is a simple and clinically useful modification of Jacobsen's progressive muscular relaxation method: (1) The person's attention should be focused on a certain muscle group (e.g., hand and forearm, forehead, abdominal region, foot). (2) At a predetermined signal from the therapist, the muscle group is tensed. (3) Tension is maintained for five to seven seconds. (4) At a predetermined cue, the muscle group is released. (5) The person's attention must be fixed upon the muscle group as it relaxes.

SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION

Wolpe's major innovation, however, is the technique of systematic desensitization, which he designed to help people who are suffering from phobias (irrational fears) centered on such things as darkness, animals, crowds, or flying in airplanes. It involves the phobic person's exposure to a series of situations (represented in his or her imagination) that would ordinarily provoke anxiety. The individual learns to maintain himself or herself in a relaxed state as progressively more threatening images are faced. Dr. Donald Tasto and Dr. Evis Skiei have described the process in their 1979 book *Spare the Couch*: "Basically, the treatment amounts to a slow

and steadily increasing exposure to a greater and greater contact with the phobic object. This reexposure is first achieved in the mind using imaginary scenes in which you approach closer and closer to the object of your phobia, while at the same time being very careful to keep yourself in a thoroughly relaxed state. Thus you provide yourself with an opportunity to relearn what it feels like to remain calm in a situation that has gained an irrational power to make you feel very panicky." Pan American World Airways used this technique to assist potential customers in overcoming their fear of flying. Also, a number of men and women in ministry have used it to diminish the excessive anxiety they feel when standing up and addressing their congregations.

SELF-HYPNOSIS AND AUTOSUGGESTION

Self-hypnosis is also useful as a means of accomplishing stress reduction. Unfortunately, many people who might profit from this technique misunderstand it and have grave reservations about its use. They have come to believe that a person under hypnosis has in some way surrendered his or her will or lost self-control. The truth is that only the conscious sensation of control is modified during hypnosis; one merely loses the feeling that one is actively regulating one's own actions. Woolfolk and Richardson have offered a vivid and reassuring comparison: "Entering the state of hypnosis is analogous to a pilot's taking his hands from the wheel, putting his airplane on automatic pilot, and sitting back for a brief rest. The pilot is available for any emergency. He has not parachuted from the aircraft." Nor are persons under hypnosis asleep, unconscious, or unaware. All their mental functions remain available to them.

It is also erroneous to think of hypnosis as involving a spell, or to view it as a result of the power or skill of a hypnotist who projects a trance onto a subject. Every person possesses the ability to enter a hypnotic state, at least to some degree. So when one learns self-hypnosis, one is simply developing and utilizing an existing capability.

Before looking more closely at self-hypnosis as a stress-reduction technique, let's first adopt the definition Woolfolk and Richardson provide for hypnosis in general. They describe it as "the altered state of consciousness that results from focusing awareness on a set of suggestions and allowing oneself to be receptive to those suggestions — all the while allowing free reign to one's powers of imagination." The hypnotic state, they add, can be deepened to a variety of levels, but a light trance is sufficient for the attainment of relaxation and the ability to respond to simple sug-

gestions. (A medium trance can be used to numb physical pain; a deep one can enable a person to experience full recall of lost memories.)

Anyone who desires to achieve the minimal alteration of consciousness that is needed to facilitate stress-reducing relaxation and autosuggestion should examine the several simple methods presented in chapter 12 of Woolfolk's *Stress, Sanity, and Survival*. The authors describe the effectiveness of self-directed (hypnotic) instructions in lowering physiologic arousal and producing feelings of inner calm. The individual diminishes tension and anxiety by giving himself or herself these suggestions while remaining in a self-induced and relatively superficial hypnotic state. To utilize successfully the safe and uncomplicated methods recommended, only four factors are essential: (1) an open, receptive mind, (2) a strong desire to learn, (3) time and a peaceful, undistracting environment, and (4) an effective set of hypnotic suggestions. As soon as one has put oneself into a light trance, one is ready to make suggestions to oneself that will diminish stress (e.g., to relax more deeply with each exhalation). Such autosuggestion can provide relief from existing tension just as effectively as it can prevent physiologic arousal (stress) from building to uncomfortable levels.

By using posthypnotic suggestions, a person can extend the effects of a self-hypnotic episode beyond the termination of the session itself. In other words, thinking and behavior can be influenced after the trance is removed. Such suggestions can be designed to reinforce a commitment to living life in some new way. For example, a posthypnotic suggestion could be: "I'm going to face life a little more calmly each day." Self-hypnosis coupled with this type of suggestion can be useful in virtually any type of self-change effort, as has been demonstrated by countless individuals who have used this combination to overcome problems with insomnia, cigarette smoking, alcohol dependence, and obesity. Autosuggestion is added to self-hypnosis so that one can present to oneself desirable propaganda precisely at the moment when one is most susceptible to being influenced by it.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

One of the very best stress-reduction techniques, and one that is available to practically everyone, is plain old physical exercise. In the first issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, we stressed that vigorous exercise, in appropriate form, intensity, and duration, contributes greatly to the development of cardiovascular fitness. Now, in connection with stress, it should be added that exercise itself is a stressor, and one that

practically forces a person to relax and unstress himself or herself when the period of exertion is over. "Vigorous activity," psychologist Jere Yates reminds us, "provides a good vehicle for getting rid of your frustrations and pent-up feelings."

Another widely popular tactic for stress reduction is yoga (meaning "union," or "fusing"). With its variety of body postures and deep, rhythmic breathing exercises, this Oriental technique engages both mind and body to achieve a state of tranquility. Those who regularly practice yoga usually find that along with mental calm and relief from stress, they achieve improved health, increased vigor, and a clearer, more alert mind. The various positions are designed for progressive development of the mobility and suppleness of the body, while the exercises aim at relaxation of particular regions with a resultant calming of the mind.

In summary, stress serves as a key factor in altering our susceptibility to disease. Medical philosopher René Dubos has observed that "more than any other contributing agent, excessive stress reactivity is the major influence in the afflictions of civilization [heart disease, strokes, migraine, arthritis, and the like]." But there is no single stress-reduction technique that works best for everyone, and we should all master one, or several, that particularly appeal to us. Since

relaxation is the antithesis of stress, we owe it to ourselves to learn how to program our lives so that the inevitable times of stress will be counterbalanced by activities that bring relaxation to the body as well as to the mind.

Finally, we would do well to review frequently the admonition Boris Pasternak bequeathed to us in his immortal novel *Doctor Zhivago*: "Your health is bound to be affected if, day after day, you say the opposite of what you feel, if you grovel before what you dislike and rejoice at what brings you misfortune. Our nervous system isn't just a fiction; it's part of our physical body, and our soul exists in space and is inside us, like the teeth in our mouth. It can't be forever violated with impunity."

RECOMMENDED READING

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Another Boost for Cooperative Behavior

Psychological researchers have found that students who took exams with self-chosen partners had reduced test anxiety, more enjoyment of the courses and subjects taken, and more confidence than those who took exams alone. One might think that the results only show that two heads are better than one in taking tests. But those who cooperated actually seemed to learn more in the course than those who did not. The results of a series of studies are reported in an article by Philip G. Zimbardo, Ph.D., Lisa D. Butler, Ph.D., and Valerie A. Wolfe, Ph.D., in

Journal of Experimental Education (Vol. 71, No. 2). In addition, Zimbardo, the principal investigator, is quoted (in *Monitor on Psychology*, April 2003, p. 18): "I am willing to argue that this change in student assessment should be incorporated throughout the educational system. After graduation, most work in business, research, and government is done in teams, and preparing students to appreciate the value of the social interaction and negotiations that make teams work effectively is vital for their future and that of our nation."

Continuing Formation for Spiritual Directors

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Directors should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and movers of souls, but the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves are instruments for directing souls to perfection through faith and the law of God, according to the spirit given by God to each one. (Living Flame of Love, 3:46)

Saint John of the Cross sets very high standards for those in the ministry of spiritual direction. In the spiritual classic *Living Flame of Love*, he dedicates a significant amount of his writing to the qualities and practices that directors must have if they want to be effective in their ministry. The teaching, advice, and guidance that Saint John offers are built upon the fundamental truth he articulates in the text above. "The principal guide is the Holy Spirit"; spiritual directors, therefore, are "instruments." To be faithful instruments, directors must be in tune with the Holy Spirit at work in those whom they direct, precisely so they can "observe the road along which God is leading" those individuals. The alternative is quite serious, according to John; directors would begin "to accommodate souls to their own method and condi-

tion." Following the guidance of the Holy Spirit would fade into the background for both the director and those being directed. The challenge for directors, then, is to be faithful instruments.

This article will focus on some elements necessary for staying in tune as instruments of the Spirit; that is, the basic components for our continuing formation as spiritual directors. Among the many strengths of the programs designed for the certification of spiritual directors is their comprehensive curriculum, covering the many and varied dimensions of this important ministry. However, not all programs provide for continuing formation after certification. Although spiritual directors usually develop their own personal and academic disciplines for maintaining and enhancing competence, they often express the desire for opportunities to receive more formal input from scripture scholars, theologians, psychologists, and anthropologists. Such input can be a valuable resource, supplementing their own attentiveness to emerging trends in the theories and theologies of human and spiritual development.

Continuing formation for spiritual directors is a convergence of areas that touches the whole of human and spiritual life. The following reflections identify four components of such a formation and invite further discussion, exploration, and elaboration.

HEALTHY LIVING IN A HECTIC WORLD

"Spiritual directors are people too." On a first and casual reading, we could quickly dismiss that as a statement of the obvious, a point that can be assumed without additional explanation. Given the sublime and sacred nature of the ministry of journeying with others on their spiritual path and of being attentive to their growth, it is possible for us to neglect dedicating sufficient attention, time, and energy to our own continuing development as human beings. This personal component of continuing formation encompasses our overall health as spiritual directors. It includes our attentiveness to every dimension of self-care: physical, emotional, relational, sociocultural, and spiritual.

The ministry of spiritual direction surely calls us to be mentors for those we serve. But there is an aspect of this ministry in which we must also be models. In journeying with others, in supporting and guiding them, we should be able to draw easily from our own experience of striving to live in a way that is healthy, whole, and holy. The apostolic usefulness of that experience will be tenuous if we are consistently negligent regarding our continued growth in one or several areas of our personal life. We must have some strategies to assure our attentiveness to such self-care. Also, we must identify those persons and mechanisms likely to challenge us if we become negligent in one or more of those areas.

Our continuing formation, as spiritual directors and as persons who desire to grow in life, must assist us in cultivating healthy living in a hectic world. For many of us, spiritual direction is not our only ministry; indeed, it may be but one among many responsibilities that we have. We often deal with exactly the same pressures and tendencies to lose balance that confront those we serve. Our active willingness and actual work to address whatever may need attention in our own life provide a sound base from which we can encourage and support others in their efforts to fashion healthy, whole, and holy lives.

Our primary focus in ministry as spiritual directors ever remains the ways and works of the Lord in the lives of those we serve. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the considerable influence that our personal life can and often does have on our perspective and interpretation of what is shared by others in the context of spiritual direction. If we fail to address or choose not to acknowledge significant issues in our life, then the din of those issues within us may become louder than anything brought to the direction session by those we serve, however intense their concerns may be.

Healthy living in a hectic world must mark our personal life and our efforts to be true instruments for directing souls. The effectiveness of our ministry as spiritual directors cannot be summed up solely by the skills and expertise we possess and use for the benefit of others. That effectiveness is gauged also by the quality of life we place before our directees each time we meet. It is a matter of integrity.

SPIRITUAL LIVING IN A SATISFIED WORLD

Precisely because our ministry calls for more than the implementation of our skills and expertise, we must recognize and embrace our need for resources greater than our own. In particular, we need a sound and sustained relationship with the Lord. On a first and casual reading, this statement too may seem obvious. Yet we need to be reminded occasionally that our relationship with the Lord is not self-sustaining; it requires our presence and attention, a commitment of our time and energy. The spiritual component of our continuing formation includes all aspects of the discipline we establish for nurturing our love relationship with the Lord.

Through the ministry of spiritual direction, we have the privilege of learning much about the spiritual life as it is experienced from day to day in the lives of those we serve. For us, this ministry can be a school of practical and experiential spirituality. We journey with others as they practice and experience their relationship with the Lord in everyday life. Still, we cannot use what we learn to displace our own need for spiritual direction or spiritual companionship. We cannot assume that the clarity and objectivity with which we may support and guide others will be as consistent and certain when we examine our own spiritual journey.

Our continuing formation, both as spiritual directors and as persons who desire to maintain a sincere and sustained relationship with the Lord, must assist us in cultivating spiritual living in a satisfied world. Even in the midst of our ministry with others, we must work to keep alive within ourselves a profound hunger for spiritual growth, a desire to know what the Lord is asking of us on our own journey. We cannot allow self-satisfaction to replace passion and so draw us into complacency. As we assist others in sustaining and strengthening their spiritual discipline, we must also seek sustenance and strength for our own spiritual life.

Issues related to our own spiritual growth and development are not always significantly different from the issues we address with those we serve in direction. If we are not appropriately attentive to our

own concerns or able to maintain a realistic perspective on our continued growth, then we may compromise the quality of support we offer to others regarding similar concerns. The focus of direction sessions can gradually shift from the issues and concerns of others to those that are unresolved or unaddressed in our own life.

Spiritual living in a satisfied world must mark our prayer life and our desire to be holy instruments for directing souls. The quality of our ministry is affected, at least in part, by our willingness to examine and explore our own journey, without being satisfied that we know and understand all the nuances of God's ways and works in our life. It is a matter of humility.

THOUGHTFUL LIVING IN A TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD

Spiritual direction is not a static ministry. It is not a collection of information and techniques that, once mastered, remains unaltered, as if set in cement. Spiritual direction is a ministry in evolution — dynamic by nature, ever responsive to and interactive with the experiences of those we serve. It must adapt, and we must adapt with it if we are to be effective. Spiritual direction is influenced by current and emerging intellectual, social, cultural, political, theological, and ecclesial events and trends precisely because the people we serve are affected by them. The professional component of our continuing formation challenges us to maintain a sufficient familiarity with the world around us if we are to be a genuine support for those who come to us.

We cannot know or determine in advance all the issues and concerns that might emerge in our meetings with those we serve; they will be as many and varied as the personalities, experiences, and interests of the individuals themselves. It is imperative that we have some fluency in and familiarity with human and faith development, scripture, theology, psychology, spirituality, ethics, liturgy, and ecumenism. Such fluency does not mean that we must become a veritable compendium of human and religious knowledge. More important, we must be familiar with and have access to resources that can provide us with the appropriate and applicable information for the benefit of those we serve.

Our continuing formation, as spiritual directors and as professionals, must assist us in cultivating thoughtful living in a technological world. We must nurture our human capacity for reflection and discernment, for resolution and decision. However technical, extensive, and useful the resources at our disposal, their value and meaning are not independent

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of their relevance to and usefulness for understanding human experience and, in particular, human growth. Thoughtful living recognizes the importance of those resources for supporting the quality of ministry we provide. Above all, though, it recognizes the responsibility we bear for nurturing our continued growth as professionals and as people who desire and seek to be united to God.

The people we encounter in spiritual direction live and work with the sophisticated technology that touches almost every aspect of life. Of course, we too are affected by that same technology. The conveniences it provides tend to create a dependence within us, making it hard for us to imagine daily life and routine without access to it. We may even use our dependence on technology as an excuse to dispense with ordinary human interaction. Nevertheless, the truth remains that significant and sustained spiritual growth requires personal interaction. It is through and with others that we ordinarily see and respond to God's presence and activity in our world, especially in daily life. Our ministry as spiritual directors challenges us to model such interaction in our own life.

Thoughtful living in a technological world must mark our professional life and our commitment to be instruments for directing souls, to be fully human and truly holy in the company of others and with their support. In ministry as in life, we must know how to tap that greatest of resources: the One who dwells within us and in whose image and likeness we were created. It is a matter of sincerity.

PASTORAL LIVING IN A PRAGMATIC WORLD

There is no single and summary category into which we could place all those we serve in spiritual

Our continuing formation as spiritual directors should assist us in developing and sustaining a thoughtful attitude and approach to life and ministry

direction. Those who come to us represent the full spectrum of characters and cultures, personalities and perspectives, blessings and burdens. They bring with them, from their personal and spiritual lives, a wide range of past and present experiences, future hopes and expectations. They hold a diversity of sacred beliefs and maintain a broad scope of religious practices. We cannot feign complete familiarity with all this; to proceed casually as if we do have full knowledge would be to ignore the true uniqueness and dignity of those who share their lives with us in spiritual direction. We are not alone in this ministry. We have access to colleagues who can assist us with their insights and recommendations, even as we may be called upon to assist them. The practical component of our continuing formation encourages us to seek appropriate assistance when necessary.

Seeking such assistance does not compromise the essentially private and personal character of spiritual direction. Rather, it reflects an awareness that as ministers, we need the practical support of others — especially those in our faith community and others who are skilled spiritual directors. The search for appropriate assistance recognizes and acknowledges that a priority for our ministry is the discernment and determination of the directions in which the Spirit is leading and moving within another person's life. With that discernment and determination, the person makes decisions that can be of tremendous importance in life. We are not alone and isolated when we guide others in the process of making such decisions; we do not rely solely on our own resources. Truly, this is the Lord's work, in us and through us. We must be ever sensitive and attentive to that work. We must also obtain assistance when necessary, both by seek-

ing supervision and by networking with others whom we can call upon for referrals.

Our continuing formation, as spiritual directors and as ministers, must assist us in cultivating pastoral living in a pragmatic world. Our capacity for listening and responding to those with whom we work in direction must be regularly refined and sharpened. In general, our ministry involves one-on-one encounters. There are surely other configurations in which spiritual direction takes place, but the usual arrangement is for the director to work with one individual at a time. Very quickly, we learn how unique individuals are in their relationship with God and in their need for continued growth and development. The pragmatism that often drives the ways in which society gauges accomplishment might cause such individual encounters to seem inefficient. A one-size-fits-all, assembly-line approach might seem preferable in the interest of time and economy of effort.

The personal nature and pastoral practice of our ministry stand in sharp contrast to such tenets. The Spirit does not work in generic ways, precisely because its work is from within the person's unique history and personality, gifts and responsibilities. Our ministry must follow the Spirit's lead in this, so that spiritual direction never becomes blind or deaf to the individuality of the person. To follow that lead, however, we must be ever attuned to the varying nuances of the Spirit's presence and activity within ourselves. We must develop and nurture the eyes and ears — and heart — to note the Spirit in our own lives. Our experience, skills, and maturation as directors will give us the eyes, ears, and heart to attend to the Spirit at work in the lives of those we serve.

Pastoral living in a pragmatic world must mark our ways and means as spiritual directors, as well as our hope and desire to be instruments for directing souls. In ministry, we work with people made in God's image and likeness — individuals who are gifts of God's creation. We must live and minister with a respect that truly celebrates that creation. It is a matter of charity.

COMMITMENT TO THOSE WE SERVE

Saint John of the Cross challenges us to be "instruments for directing souls." Our effectiveness in this ministry will be shaped, at least in part, by the quality of our continuing formation. Undoubtedly, the specific content of that formation will vary, depending upon our particular needs in life and ministry. Nevertheless, we can all focus on certain general areas as we formulate a strategic plan for our growth as ministers. Our seriousness concerning that

growth reflects a genuine commitment to those we serve.

Our continuing formation as spiritual directors must be designed to assist us in developing and sustaining a healthy attitude and approach to life and ministry. With integrity, we must attend to any and every dimension of our life that could compromise or counteract our effectiveness in ministry. That integrity will involve a regular evaluation of the physical, emotional, relational, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of our life. Furthermore, that evaluation must be done without assuming that whatever needs attention will become obvious. The status of our overall health may be much more nuanced than the obvious can sometimes reveal. Honesty with ourselves is the operative priority here. Subtle changes in one or several dimensions in life, if neglected or ignored, can affect our perspective in ministry, our understanding of those we serve, and our response to the needs of their unique spiritual journey.

Continuing formation must enable us to develop and sustain a spiritual attitude and approach to life and ministry. With humility, we must assure that our own spiritual discipline remains realistic and resilient in the midst of the ordinary and sometimes extraordinary activities, pressures, and responsibilities that shape our daily life. That humility involves a review of our discipline to determine if and how it may need modification. It also includes the recognition of our own need for direction as an important support for growth and development in the spiritual life. Fidelity is the operative priority here. Our ministry as spiritual directors does not immunize us against the possibility — however inadvertent — of neglecting personal prayer, spiritual reading, participation in a faith community, or any of the basic components for maintaining a vibrant relationship with the Lord. Diminishment in the importance we assign to our spiritual life can compromise our ability to accompany others on their spiritual journey and to offer them experienced guidance.

Our continuing formation as spiritual directors must be designed to assist us in developing and sustaining a thoughtful attitude and approach to life and ministry. With sincerity, we must examine the means and methods we use in formulating our responses and suggestions to those we serve. That sincerity will involve an assessment of our continuing education in terms of theology, human and faith development, and emerging trends in spirituality and spiritual direction. It also entails maintaining familiarity with issues related to the culture and context in which we minister. Sensitivity is the operative priority here. Spiritual direction does not function well if it is cast

Charity is the standard we must use to determine the quality of our responsiveness to others

in concrete; it must be sufficiently sensitive to respond with some proficiency. The regular assessment of our skills and techniques will identify whatever refinement and reeducation may be necessary to ensure our competence in ministry. Our responsibility to those we serve requires no less.

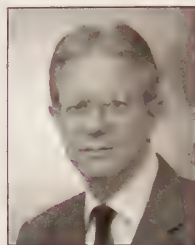
Continuing formation must help us in cultivating a pastoral attitude and approach to life and ministry. Charity is the standard we must use to determine the quality of our responsiveness to others, for it is the heart of our ministry as spiritual directors. Charity marks the difference between assisting those we serve in building a durable relationship with the Lord, and simply talking about God as a topic of interest with them. Compassion is the operative priority here. Spiritual direction strives to support those we serve by understanding their developing experience of life and by offering appropriate strategies for strengthening their relationship with the Lord and enhancing their practice of faith. We cultivate such understanding and support by practicing our everyday ministry as directors, and by using various resources to keep pace with others in this ministry: participating in organizations for directors, reading relevant periodicals and publications, and belonging to a network of other directors and counselors for referral, supervision, and exchange of ideas. We can and do make a difference in others' lives, especially when we minister with love for the Lord and compassionate concern for others. These are significant and even identifying elements of our commitment to those we serve.

OBSERVE THE ROAD

In the quote that opened this article, Saint John

of the Cross characterizes spiritual directors as "instruments for directing souls." That is already a significant challenge, given the quality of life and ministry it calls us to develop and maintain. Immediately following that challenge, though, he articulates a pressing mandate: "The whole concern of directors should not be to accommodate souls to their own method and condition, but they should observe the road along which God is leading one; if they do not recognize it, they should leave the soul alone and not bother it." It is intriguing that Saint John speaks of directors in this context as either recognizing the road along which others are traveling or merely being a bother to them on their journey. In the latter case, he does not hesitate to say that the director should leave the person alone. The difference lies in our ability to recognize and understand something of the Lord's ways and works in others' lives. This recognition and understanding are at the very core of becoming and being proficient instruments for directing souls — instruments who facilitate the Lord's work and communicate the Spirit's wisdom.

Integrity, humility, sincerity, and charity are the basic qualities that will guide and support us in forging a life and ministry that are healthy, spiritual, thoughtful, and pastoral. Our continuing formation, therefore, should be designed to assist us in cultivating those qualities throughout life. Those same qualities will be among the greatest gifts we can bring to others through the ministry of spiritual direction. Such gifts will keep us, and those we serve, mindful of the fundamental truth that "the principal guide is the Holy Spirit." As spiritual directors, we have the potential and the privilege of serving others as instruments for directing souls.



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Hostility Produces Protein Linked with Heart Disease

In a recent study, researchers have shown that men who are highly hostile toward others produce, at higher levels, a protein (called "tumor necrosis factor" or TNF) that is associated with risk for cardiovascular problems. It has been known for some time that risk factors for heart disease, such as smoking, high blood pressure, obesity and high cholesterol are associated with increased levels of TNF. This study, by Edward C. Suarez, Ph.D., James G. Lewis, Ph.D., and Cynthia Kuhn, Ph.D., demonstrates that psychological factors such as high levels of hostility and anger seem to produce this same protein. The presence of higher levels of TNF would explain why these factors are also associated with increased risk for heart disease.

The study was published in *Brain, Behavior and Immunity* (Vol. 16, No. 6) and reported in *Monitor on Psychology* (March, 2003). The same issue of *Monitor* reported on advances in anger management in an article by Jennifer Daw Holloway. It seems that a combination of relaxation techniques and cognitive therapy in which clients are helped to envision alternative ways of thinking and reacting to anger are the most helpful. She also reports that researchers are now finding "that catharsis — letting it all out" — isn't helpful and, in fact, may increase a person's hostility, according to a 1999 study by Brad Bushman, Ph.D., and colleagues, published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Vol. 76, No. 3).

A Church Moving Toward Healing

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

Rowan Williams (now the Archbishop of Canterbury) first published *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* in 1982 — well in advance of the sex scandals that have rocked our church during the past few years. Nevertheless, his insights into the nature and gifts of the resurrection offer us ways to grapple with the healing process that needs to be undertaken in the church, not only here in our country but in other parts of the world as well.

Referring to the Acts of the Apostles — “There is salvation in no one else” (4:12) — Williams suggests that the resurrection offers us an invitation to “recognize one’s victim as one’s hope.” In Jesus’ case, the crucified is God’s chosen. But God always identifies with the victim, and it is in the company of the victim that God is to be found. Conversion for the people of Jerusalem required a turning back to Jesus, whom they had rejected and condemned, and an acknowledgment that their hope was to be found nowhere else but in him. Salvation does not bypass the history and memory of guilt; it builds on them and from them.

Would that the church of today had followed this example. How differently the victims of sexual abuse and their families might have been treated if church officials had recognized that it is in the company of the victim that God is to be found. Rather than reject-

ing them, failing to believe the truth of their complaints, treating them as scapegoats, or condemning them to a life of silence, church officials might have welcomed the victims, learned from them, and received challenge and enrichment as together they worked to address the problem of abuse.

HISTORY OF VIEWS ON ABUSE

Secular society was slow to identify such behaviors as the physical and sexual abuse of children as criminal acts, preferring to view them as “domestic matters.” In a similar vein, the church tended to classify priests’ illicit sexual activity with minors under the rubric of sin and weakness and, as such, dealt with it as matter for confession, sometimes responding with punitive internal discipline but sometimes not.

Sustained public attention in our country was not drawn to the physical abuse of children until the 1970s. The bibliography of my doctoral dissertation — a study of female child-abusers, completed in 1976 — contained less than forty articles or books addressing the topic of physical abuse. Sexual abuse took even longer to be identified as a problem large in scope and worthy of legal attention. When such cases were prosecuted, offenders with good lawyers and

Many church leaders continued “confessional model” of dealing with sexual problems and maintained a policy of silence

sufficient means might enter into plea bargains that permitted them to seek mental health treatment rather than to serve time in prison.

Similarly, the church began to acknowledge such behaviors as sexual activity with minors as indicators of psychopathology, sending priests exhibiting such behaviors to treatment centers of one sort or another. The reluctance of the judicial system to involve itself in church-related situations was an enabling factor in the church's choosing to handle the problem this way. It was easier to point out that the cleric-offender was obtaining treatment than to prosecute. The power of the clerical persona was often felt in the treatment centers as well: few of those working at such facilities seemed to have faced the fact that, had these same individuals been laymen, they might have been convicted of various misdemeanors or felonies and been sentenced to prison time.

Over the past thirty to forty years, the push for civil rights, women's rights, and children's rights gave voice to members of our society who previously were silent. Often spoken in what critics describe as strident tones, the truth of the indignities, and sometimes atrocities, suffered by African Americans, women, and children has seeped in, eventually penetrating our national consciousness and setting in motion the slow, often painful work of healing. Although our society is far from perfect in these areas, there is some recognition that permanent change has been initiated. Witness, for example, the political fall of Trent Lott, who made the mistake of harkening back to “the good old days” when racial segregation was the law of the land.

Regrettably, as we as a nation have moved

painfully toward acknowledging our role as oppressors, attempting to look squarely at our history, including our corporate and individual guilt, the church, in many areas of this country and the world, has failed to keep pace. As the events of the past two to three years have made clear, many church leaders continued the “confessional model” of dealing with sexual problems and maintained a policy of silence shrouding from public view documents pertaining to clergy abuse and settlements reached in such cases. The cry for transparency and openness was largely unheeded, for most in the church continued to deny the full extent of sexual abuse and their complicity in perpetuating it through ignorance, misinformation, or injudicious transfers of those accused. As materials detailing complaints about child sexual abuse have surfaced in the media, often in response to court orders, all segments of the church have experienced feelings of shame, outrage, and profound sadness. In this sense, we are all victims, our trust having been violated not only by the priests guilty of sexual abuse but also by those in authority who covered up such activity.

In the midst of this pain, Williams reminds us that one of the gifts of the risen Christ is “memory restored in hope.” Memory, in this case, involves acknowledging the full scope and full cost of the untruthfulness of the past without being crippled or paralyzed by it. Truthfulness — perceived as a constant, self-critical, alert, prayerful, and receptive turning back to Jesus — is a gift of the indwelling Spirit whose abiding presence is a source of hope.

CHURCH MUST ACKNOWLEDGE PAST ERRORS

To the extent that our church opens itself to receiving its past and recovering its memory regarding those who suffered abuse, it will enter into the purifying furnace of truth. United with the Spirit of truth, the church is invited to witness to the possibility of living with the fullness of its own painful reality, as were Peter and the other disciples who denied and abandoned Jesus. In accepting its liability to error and self-deceit, however, the church also is offered the possibility of experiencing the inner leaven of the Spirit, moving it toward truth, penitence, and transformation. Only as a penitent church — one that has built self-criticism into its own life and structures — can the church hope to regain its moral authority and renew its commission to share the forgiveness of the risen Christ with the world. Recognizing itself as forgiven, the church, like the early disciples, may then claim the fullness of its

identity, becoming a transmitter of hope and a preacher of the gospel.

We may well ask, “Just how is the church to do penance?” Recovering its memory and becoming acutely aware of its shortcomings would seem to be the first steps along the road to penance, for no wound can be healed unless it is first acknowledged. During the Jubilee Year 2000, for example, Pope John Paul II acknowledged and offered public apologies for a number of the church’s past failures. In the current situation, the need to save face, to uphold the good image of the church, fostered a tremendous denial of wrongdoing — and, far too often, a projection of blame onto the victims. In a similar fashion, the failure of church officials and clergy to identify their personal shadows, including needs for power and lack of integrated sexuality — coupled with the need to present a good front to the world — may have served to blind them to their potential for abuse and deceit.

We laypeople have also contributed to the climate of denial, preferring to think that *our* church, *our* clergy and bishops, were far removed from any suspicion of this sort of wrongdoing. By clinging to beliefs of this type, we contributed to the denial of the full humanity of our clergy — for example, considering them immune, in some magical way, to the drives and urges that are common to the rest of humankind. Placing *our* church, prelates, and clergy on a pedestal made it much more difficult for those who may have recognized their own need for psychological help to obtain it. Shame, pride, and guilt are the major barriers that must be overcome by any person seeking treatment for psychological problems. The stigma of “seeking help for mental problems” continues to act as a deterrent to doing so for many in our society. How much more difficult it is to seek help for those whose training may have fostered a narcissistic notion of self-perfection, perhaps compounded by the exaggerated expectations of those to whom they ministered.

Williams suggests that another gift of the resurrection is the picture of oneself — in this case, the church and its ministers — as a crucifier whose actions are capable of causing pain and violence. To receive this gift, church officials will need to acknowledge the reality of the shadow side of the church as well as the shadow side of clergy, including themselves. It means being able to see church and clergy in the role of victimizer — surely a drastic change of identity for a church that has suffered persecutions and for persons accustomed to thinking of themselves as upright and perhaps even morally superior to others. Yet a broader look at church history pro-

vides numerous examples of the church’s involvement in the political sphere, suggesting that use and abuse of power are as characteristic of the church as piety and martyrdom.

Finding that they themselves are responsible for the diminution of others, Williams points out, allows the church’s officials and clergy to discover themselves as sharing solidarity in sin — and that, in its own way, is a source of hope. Through acceptance of full responsibility for past abuse and deceit, church officials and ministers have the potential to discover the possibility for a transformed relationship with those who have been abused. Awareness brings with it an opportunity to examine and realign the structures that helped give rise to abuse and deceit. To know oneself as “crucifier” is to know oneself as responsible, as a maker of oppression. Church officials and clergy are not limited to this role, however, for the power to make is joined with the power to remake or reform. Through the creative forgiveness of the Risen One, they are able to say yes to those things that have the potential to create a new, more just order.

There are many levels on which acknowledgment of past errors might be made. Already, some bishops and pastors have begun to reach out to victims of sexual abuse. Sometimes penitence has been demonstrated in the form of liturgies for healing; at other times, meetings have been held at which clergy, accustomed to having “speaking privileges,” have learned to listen to those who had been silenced. Apologies for past failures have initiated a process of grieving aimed at seeking forgiveness. Repentance has been expressed through resignation from active ministry or retirement from church office by those guilty of sexual abuse or implicated in covering up the problem. While acknowledging that monetary settlements alone cannot heal, such settlements have served as tokens of justice and have often made it possible for those abused to obtain treatment that would otherwise be unaffordable. Appointing laypeople to head the bishops’ national committee on child sexual abuse and to work with similar committees on the diocesan or parish level also offers the promise of greater openness in the inner dealings of the church.

MOVEMENT TOWARD HEALING

Efforts are also being made to prevent future abuse. Psychological screening of potential seminary candidates has been mandatory for at least the past twenty-five years. Offering, as it does, some insight into the relational strengths and weakness of candidates, as well as some indication of their ability to

cope adequately with the normal stressors of life, screening serves to aid in the discernment of those able to be effective ministers. Many seminaries have made an effort to include programs and workshops designed to assist candidates in the area of sexual integration. Increased use of psychological evaluation and psychotherapy throughout the formation process would be helpful. Programs geared toward personal growth and social support of priests during the first five years after ordination would also be useful, as those years, in which priests adjust to their new role, are especially stressful. In addition, dioceses and parishes might consider offering educational opportunities designed to alert parents and teachers to indicators of possible sexual abuse in minors. A clearly written, well-publicized policy for reporting suspected abuse ought to be in place in every parish, not merely in parishes operating schools.

Whatever concrete steps the church takes in the spirit of truth-speaking and penance, we need to be mindful that the goal is to bring about a transformation of the relationship among church officials, clergy, laity, those abused, and those deceived. A transformed relationship is not one based on role reversal or simple inversion, with those who were formerly victims becoming the new oppressors. Williams reminds us that atonement by reversal indicates that all of us remain trapped in the illusion that the basic form of human relationship is one of oppression — powerful versus powerless, haves versus have-nots — with various individuals or groups cast in one position or another at any given time. Such reversals, by their refusal to take seriously the possibility of transcending the oppressive relationship, are decidedly unhelpful, for they fail to recognize that reconciliation and restoration, not counterviolence and further oppression, were the hallmarks of the risen Jesus. As Williams points out, if God is the enemy of all human diminution, then God is present in all the “unfinishedness” of the relationship between victim and abuser, “as the half-heard cry for some unimaginable leap into reconciliation.”

In her book *Embracing Travail*, feminist theologian Cynthia Crysdale notes that neither the myth of redemptive violence nor that of redemptive suffering serves to achieve the sort of transformation that promotes justice. What is needed, she tells us, is a third way that embraces yet goes beyond the cycle of oppression, neither attempting to combat domination by using its tools nor surrendering while adopting the assumptions of the system in power and learning to work astutely within it. Contending that we must move beyond what she terms an “ethic of control” to an “ethic of risk,” Crysdale maintains that

the distorted cycle of domination-suffering, oppressor-victim must be replaced by an empowering cycle of healing-forgiveness.

PROGRESS REQUIRES TRANSFORMATION

In attempting to visualize how to move beyond the cycle of oppression, it might be helpful to recall Eric Berne's theory of transactional analysis. Berne identified the ego states Parent, Adult, and Child, which are found in each person, and observed the way these states influence our interactions with others. When carried beyond what is age- and stage-appropriate — for example, a parent interacting with his or her child — Parent-Child relationships tend to be dysfunctional forms of relating based on dominance-submission. The way to transform such a relationship is not through role reversal, in which the person who was the Child (submissive) becomes the Parent (dominant). Instead, it is for each person to respond from the segment of his or her personality termed the Adult, thus establishing a complementary relationship based on mutuality.

It is this Adult-Adult relationship that needs to be established now between ordained ministers, priests and bishops, and the laity. To do so, however, will require a great deal of effort on both sides. Ordained ministers are likely to cling fiercely to their current Parent role; in truth, few of us would willingly surrender power and privilege. On the other hand, it is likely that the temptation for those who perceive themselves in the Child position will be to attempt to gain power by becoming the Parent. Williams and Crysdale would envision such a reversal as merely a perpetuation of the oppressive cycle. Berne would call such a reversal a way of keeping a “game” going rather than reaching a more lasting and appropriate solution.

Efforts on the part of ordained ministers and laity to enter into a cycle of healing-forgiveness can be based only on our belief in God, who overcomes evil not by domination but by transformation, willing to risk entrance into a world tainted with evil. Accepting this ethic of risk means that even as we struggle for the creation of structures that are more just within the church, we must not succumb to the seduction of utopian ideals, in which all conflict is eliminated through uniformity of thought and elimination of differences. Setting up highly specific expectations of change — for example, focusing on a married clergy, women priests, or a lay review board as *the* solution to the problem of sexual abuse — has the potential to create attachments to one or more particular structures that may become addictions. Certainly, old

visions of power, of governance, of ways of relating must die — but their replacements also must continue to die in their turn, as the process is an ongoing one. Crysdale urges us to move beyond specific expectations to hope that is flexible and willing to change its goals — embracing the future and embodying images of new possibilities, yet never turning such images into idols.

It is healing grace, says Crysdale, that operates as an intervention into the distorted cycles of domination and alienation. Grace heals the wounded and the perpetrator alike, making reconciliation possible. Reconciliation, in turn, generates still other gifts of forgiveness and healing at the level of the community, as well as that of the individual. Our church — including ourselves, as members of that church — needs to be purged, through the presence of healing grace, of the distorted desires that perpetuate cycles of oppression. Grace is neither instant in its action nor permanent in its effects, but it shifts probabilities, opening us to new understandings that allow us to grasp the meaning and healing possibilities of a situation, thus making authentic living more likely. It serves as a process of growth, calling the entire church to conversion — a conversion that involves setting up new structures of decision making and scrutinizing ways of operation in an effort to free ourselves from the distortions of the oppressive cycles into which we all have been socialized.

While church officials and clergy need to seek ways to do penance, redress specific wrongs, and create structures wherein power is more equitably shared with the laity, we who have been victimized, whether through actual sexual abuse or through deceit, also are required to enter into the cycle of healing and forgiveness, seeking to transform our relationships with our church's ordained ministers. For many, this seems to be a challenge, just as it is difficult for us to open ourselves to healing and forgiveness in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Although we long for healing, we find the process arduous and thoughts of forgiveness somewhat disturbing. As is true of others who have suffered a betrayal of trust (perhaps in terms of physical abuse, marital infidelity, or divorce), many of us wonder if forgiveness can be reached in our lifetime.

Even in situations where we have much smaller hurts to forgive, we sometimes seem more intent on nursing our anger than freeing ourselves from its corrosive power. In situations involving enormous betrayals of trust, we may be tempted to allow anger to nest in our hearts because there is something about the very thought of forgiveness that flies in the

face of our human sense of justice, which in our society is often linked with a desire for retribution or revenge. Given the current situation, even to begin to entertain thoughts of forgiveness may be perceived as an added betrayal of ourselves or of people we love who have been severely wronged.

GENUINE FORGIVENESS

Perhaps some of our reluctance to forgive stems from pressure to “get over it,” as if recovering from abuse and other betrayals of trust were an easy task. Seeking a quick solution that glosses over genuine pain for the sake of appearances simply perpetuates the cycle of oppression, in this case by seeming to surrender while engaging in subtle, manipulative ways of expressing anger. Genuine forgiveness that leads to the healing and transformation of relationships does not ask that we deny the fact that we have been wronged, nor is forgiveness to be equated with condoning a wrong or surrendering principles and values for the sake of creating an artificial sense of goodwill.

It is also important that those who have suffered sexual abuse recognize that forgiveness in no way implies full reconciliation with the actual perpetrators of the abuse, because such reconciliation may be detrimental to the person abused. While forgiveness, viewed from the interpersonal level, does create the possibility for a relationship to heal, it occurs at its most basic level within the heart and mind of the person wronged. This level of forgiveness involves replacing thoughts of anger and revenge with a simple desire for the other's general well-being. Genuine forgiveness is a gift, a movement of grace that takes us beyond the limits of human justice — healing us and, perhaps, those who have offended and betrayed us, while leading us to self-transcendence.

Opening ourselves to the gift and grace of forgiveness is not an easy matter, for forgiveness is not a static state but an ongoing process that we repeat “seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22). Sometimes we think we have come to a place of forgiveness, only to find that further facets of the offense manifest themselves, requiring (or so it seems) that we begin the entire process again. It is this reworking of the same offense from its many different angles, however, that is the real meaning of our forgiving seventy times seven.

Entering into the cycle of healing and forgiveness requires maturity on our part, in addition to the Spirit's gifts of fortitude and understanding. It is likely that many — particularly those actually abused and their families — will experience this process as

falling into an abyss of pain that seems to have no end. The entire church — including the abused, the betrayed, the laity, the clergy, and officials — is likely to experience a long period of darkness before light begins to dawn again. The growth that occurs during this lengthy incubation period, however, has the potential to bring healing and open us to new dimensions of wisdom.

What are some of the tasks we are likely to face as we set the process of healing-forgiveness in motion? For those who were abused, the path generally begins with psychotherapy, which assists in working through the myriad emotional, physical, behavioral, and spiritual issues related to the sexual trauma and its aftermath. It is to be hoped that sufficient therapeutic work will help the person move from the position of victim to that of survivor and, eventually, to that of thriver — a person whose energy is no longer directed toward recovering from past abuse but is instead focused on establishing and realizing life goals.

For those not abused but angered by the fact of abuse and the subsequent cover-up, one of the first tasks seems to be to give up the fantasy that we are sufficiently knowledgeable and powerful to order either our world or our church as we would wish it. Letting go of this fantasy opens us to the experience of our own finiteness and smallness; surrendering our illusory knowledge and power places us in solidarity with Job, who came to peace with the mystery of God only after a long struggle to understand his situation in the light of human justice and a human reward system.

Entering into the process of forgiveness also requires that we hold ourselves to the same level of accountability that we expect of those who have wronged us. It means that we recognize the truth of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's observation: "The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." As noted above, we also need to confront our contribution to the situation — for example, the denial that kept us from facing and doing something about illicit activity or failing to offer support to our ministers, leading us to demand instead a level of "perfection" that made it difficult for those in need to seek help. While we were neither responsible for the acts of sexual abuse that were committed nor directly responsible for the covering up of such acts, it may well be that our anger, obstinacy, and pride are now hindrances on the road to forgiveness. If that is so, a shift in focus is required to remind us of the common clay from which all of us are made.

Although the way to forgiveness is not easy, we may be encouraged to learn that it is the person who does the forgiving, not the person forgiven, who actu-

ally profits more. One of the key benefits deriving from forgiveness is our rejecting the victim role, with its embracing of suffering, weakness, and distress, as a major part of our identity. Letting go of the victim role enhances the possibilities for entering into a transformed, adult relationship with church and clergy alike. Forgiveness breaks the cycle of negative emotion generated when we continue to feel angry toward an institution ("the church") or toward a person with whom we have no actual contact at this time. As a result, our physical and mental health is enhanced as chronic stress is reduced.

Forgiveness also creates hope while opening us to the need for hope. Our experience as Christians reminds us that we live in hope of a salvation that is "already but not yet." As we embark on the work of establishing a transformed relationship with our church and clergy, let us recognize, as Rowan Williams reminds us, that we are all part of a penitent church, in which no one's failure is his or hers alone, and that no failure, no matter how grave, can put an end to the relation of mutual gift that is the ground of the community's life. The gift of the Spirit and the promise of Jesus remain as true for us today as they were for the early disciples: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

RECOMMENDED READING

- Arnold, J. *Seventy Times Seven*. Farmington, Pennsylvania: Plough, 1997.
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BOOK REVIEWS

Radical Gratitude by Mary Jo Leddy, Ph.D.
Maryknoll, N.Y.: ORBIS Books, 2002. 182
pages. \$18.00.

Dr. Leddy's writing is deeply in touch with North American culture. She intelligently deconstructs today's socio-economic milieu and identifies its psychological effects. In response, convinced that it is human beings who shape and can change economics, she offers what she calls "habits of being" that can lead to inner liberation and to accessing energy and creativity for change. At the very heart of these habits, she recommends the habit of "radical gratitude" — by which she means not the mere counting of one's blessings, but a foundational gratitude that wells up when we become conscious of the gift of life itself. This gratitude can lead to the liberating realization that "I am enough, I'm good enough, and I have enough." And it can impart a sense of power not as domination and possession, but as the creative energy of the universe — enabling new choices.

To help us grasp what she means by gratitude, Leddy relates stories of people in grave circumstances who found themselves caught up in amazement at the mere fact of being, and were changed by this experience. She recounts her own narrow escape when a fire engine ran over her car, and the generous response of a passerby that seemed a sign from heaven. Such experiences often occur in the face of life's extremities — birth and death. They awaken a sense of mystery, and in the religiously inclined, a sense of the eternal or of the economy of grace, where what is most precious is freely given.

But there is much that prevents us today from coming in touch with such experiences. In past decades, "the modern myth of progress carried our lives forward by the sheer force of optimism....The point of life [was] to better yourself and to make a better world."

Today the vision of a better future is fading — people live for the immediate. Leddy's book is worth reading if just for its analysis of what she calls "America, the North and the West" (of which Canada is a part) — "an empire in decline." In today's culture, money dominates, and humanistic values are trumped by over-riding self-interest. "Consumerism has become the modern secular version of meaning. Consumer confidence has become the new economic indicator of hope."

Our culture seeks to persuade us that a consumer-driven economy will lead to a better world. In countless ways it promotes our "need" for more and better goods, services, or whatever else can possibly be marketed. It encourages a state of constant craving and dissatisfaction that becomes so familiar that we are scarcely aware of it. Even the hunger for justice can manifest in an unhappy craving that cannot produce lasting social change.

Leddy believes that inner dissatisfaction expands until it eventually "implodes" in a profound dissatisfaction with oneself — "I am not enough" — and in an accompanying guilt. Often isolated, demoralized by bureaucratic systems, and diverted by superficial entertainments, people are likely to be tempted by the resentment that springs of powerlessness, and unlikely to question the corporate agenda they have internalized.

Pointing out that all great religions have recommended practices that enable people to live by what inspires them, Leddy's final chapter offers ten "habits of being" with the potential to transform our lives. Besides radical gratitude, she urges, for instance, a habit she terms, "Begin before you are ready." By this she means seize the split second of insight to begin to act. "It is only our cultural illusions that dictate that we should wait for the perfect moment."

—Beth Porter, M.A., M.Div.

Religious Life in America: A New Day Dawning by Sean Sammon. Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 2002. 204 pages. \$12.95.

Mount St. Helens erupted on the morning of May 18, 1980. In the aftermath of the explosion, ash quickly drifted downwind, painting the skies of eastern Washington with a dark gray hue. Over 150 square miles of forest lay devastated, and biologists forecast that the area under the ash would remain barren for generations.

Within two seasons, however, an unexpected and astonishing rebirth was under way. Plant and animal life began to flourish, and the U.S. government launched a massive salvage and reforestation effort. The opening chapter in a long-term (200- to 500-year) succession sequence was set in motion.

Sean Sammon's *Religious Life in America: A New Day Dawning* paints a similar picture of hope on what has until now been the rather bleak canvas entitled "The Future of Religious Life." His thesis: religious communities committed to prayer and evangelization have every reason for optimism. To realize the hope expressed by Sammon, however, American religious must "grasp the nettle firmly" by revitalizing the unique charisms of their foundations (individually and collectively) and by bearing active witness in the world to life in Christ, especially to young people.

Sammon's book, which went to press prior to the sexual scandals among clergy in the winter of 2002 and spring of 2003, is all the more welcome in that it comes at a time of questioning, and even disillusionment, for many Roman Catholics in the United States. The author begins with a synthesis of the past forty years of religious life. He describes well the "identity crisis" brought about by Vatican II's less-than-lucid response to the role of consecrated life. He gives examples of problematic interactions between the leaders of men's and women's religious congregations in the United States and between Vatican congregations and members of the hierarchy in this country. He concludes his overview with a discussion of *Vita Consecrata* and the helpful role it played in

clarifying religious life as distinct from the lay and clerical states. Sammon's outline of nearly a half century of events is objective, well documented, and illuminating. It also helps point the way toward the task of reimagining religious life for the twenty-first century.

Sammon offers a thoughtful analysis of the upheavals that have occurred in religious life over several centuries. His overview provides hopefulness about life beyond decline and efforts at revitalization. There's a perverse assurance in the fact that nearly two-thirds of the men's religious orders founded before 1800 no longer exist.

In addressing the question of a vocation worthy of one's life, Sammon helps move the discussion on the future of religious life into "fast forward." While clarity of identity and the centrality of prayer in the lives of current religious are critical to their survival, promoting vocations to regenerate religious communities for mission will determine their survival beyond this generation. On that subject, Sammon's challenge is stark: if religious groups don't allocate significant time to recruiting new members, they won't have a future and won't deserve one.

In some ways, Sammon's challenge is bewildering; it requires religious to get their identity straight, be prayerful, nurture community life and spirituality, and learn the language of the people. "Do *one* thing," he writes; "invite others to share in the life and mission of your congregation." Taking this one, proactive step may naturally lead to addressing all the issues embodied in his challenge.

Sammon paints an optimistic picture of the future in *Religious Life in America*. Perhaps we're still in that period similar to the weeks and months after the eruption of Mount St. Helens: buried seeds must be nurtured, God and nature must be allowed to act, and we must creatively attend to the work of the reclamation and reforestation for the next fifty to one hundred years. Sammon's book helps raise our hearts and minds to focus on those tasks. Best of all, he shows us how to put one foot in front of the other.

—John E. Kerrigan

Correction: In the Spring 2003 edition, Creighton University's Web site address for prayer was incorrectly listed. The correct address is <http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html>.

Invitation to Authors

The principal intention of our editorial staff and board in publishing HUMAN DEVELOPMENT is to be of help to people involved in the work of fostering the growth of others. This growth, which is as important for the well-being of society as it is for that of individuals, cannot be achieved apart from beneficial interaction among persons; nor can it be accomplished without the grace of the Creator, who wants us all to live our lives as maturely as possible and is glorified by our doing so. The articles we publish are written to contribute to the promotion of such constructive interaction among persons, and between them and God.

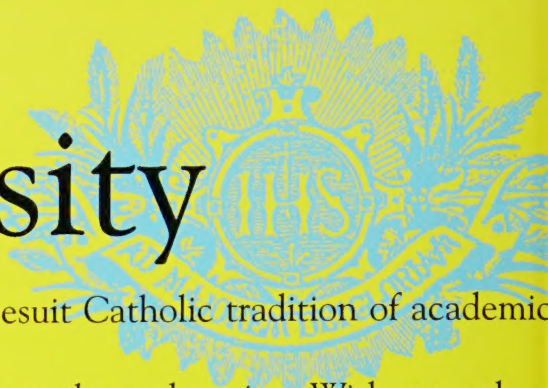
The intellectual, emotional, spiritual, moral, physical, sexual, and cultural aspects of human development are all of deep concern to us. It is our hope that writers who desire to contribute to the ministry this magazine represents will feel encouraged to deal with any of these areas of growth, keeping in mind the fact that our readers include church leaders, pastoral ministers, educators, religious superiors, spiritual directors, athletic coaches, religious formation personnel, campus ministers, missionaries, people performing healing ministries, parents, women and men engaged in lay ministry, and other people of various religious denominations who have in their care persons of all ages whom they want to help develop to the fullest degree of maturity, happiness, and human effectiveness.

We want the articles we publish to be of interest to as many of these readers as possible. We want the content of the articles to shed theoretical light on the various aspects of human development. We also desire to provide as many how-to articles as we can, in which authors describe for our readers what they have learned from both their successful and their unsuccessful attempts to nourish the growth of others. We are especially interested in presenting articles that discuss the ways that development-related issues and problems are handled and ministries are performed in diverse cultural settings around the world. We want to receive reviews of books and films; reports on research, workshops, symposia, and courses; interviews; and letters to our editor.

In brief, we publish HUMAN DEVELOPMENT so that people wishing to become fully alive and to help others do the same can benefit from the knowledge and experience of writers at home in such fields as theology, psychology, medicine, psychiatry, sociology, spirituality, education, and organizational development — writers who realize the importance of sharing their expertise with appreciative readers in 150 different countries, who are generous enough to take time to put their ideas on paper so that human beings can become what we are created to be: persons being made whole in the image and likeness of God.

Linda D. Amadeo, R.N., M.S.
Executive Editor

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